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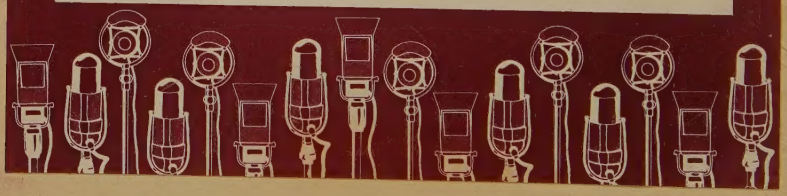

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Miss Minerva Broadcasts Billy

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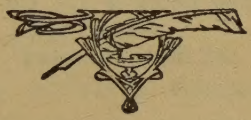
By

EMMA SPEED SAMPSON

Author of

"Billy and the Major," "Miss Minerva's Baby,"

"Miss Minerva on the Old Plantation"



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Miss Minerva Broadcasts Billy

CHAPTER I

BILLY'S SECRET

T SEEMS but yesterday that Josephine, Miss Minerva's baby, was cutting her first teeth; and William Green Hill, Miss Minerva's nephew, was losing his. Now, behold! Josephine is absurdly and lovably snaggle-toothed, while William Green Hill — Billy, for short — has long ago cut his twelve-year molars and would not be at all astonished to feel his wisdom teeth sprouting.

We might say it with teeth — this tale of how William Green Hill came to live

with his Aunt Minerva, a seemingly confirmed old maid; and how Major Estes persuaded her to marry him, to the delight of Billy; and how Wilkes Booth Lincoln ran away from the river plantation in search of his little white friend; and how fat old Aunt Cindy came to cook for them; and how Josephine, the sprite, came straight from Heaven to be the Major's and Miss Minerva's baby. In the tale were Jimmy Garner and Lina Hamilton and Frances Black and Tom Collins, to say nothing of the very wicked goat and Brownie, the pony, and Flumpy, Josephine's dog. All of them, we are thankful to say, are still in the tale — with the exception of the wicked billy goat, who long ago died a shameful death owing to his unbridled appetite for barbed wire.

The children are growing older every day and so is Flumpy. Brownie has be-

come so old he can't get any older, but he can still draw the little pony cart — provided the passengers are not in a hurry to get where they are going. Pony and rig have been presented by Billy to his little cousin, for Billy is always in a hurry and can get where he is going faster on his own long legs. He loves Brownie, but he also loves "The Robber Kitten," "Little Black Sambo" and "Swiss Family Robinson," yet he has given those precious volumes to Josephine for her very own.

Mrs. Joseph Estes, nee Miss Minerva, hasn't grown older at all. She never was very young and perhaps she never will be very old. Happiness and the mellowing influence of the Major, along with Billy and the baby, have made time stand still withal for the once severe and unbendingly virtuous Minerva.

As for the Major, he grows younger

every day. No wrinkles have yet come to the pink rotundity of his smiling face. His eyesight is as keen and his hearing as acute as in the old Indian fighting days. Genial and kindly, given to treats and surprises, full of jokes and puns, beloved by old and young, rich and poor, black and white, long live the Major!

Aunt Cindy is the same amazingly fat philosopher of yore. Her cooking is still the best in Tennessee, where all cooking is good. Her kind old eyes have had to call to their aid great steel rimmed spectacles, "so that nothin' don't drap in the victuals that ain't meant ter be et." Her brown face still beams with love and affection when she gazes through the strong lenses at Billy or Josephine, her two darlings; but her voice, when she calls to Wilkes Booth Lincoln, has lost none of its ominous rumbling as she threatens dire punish-

ments to the colored youth if he should do anything he should not do or leave undone anything he should do. She still delights in critical gossip concerning Sarah Jane, the cook next door. Aunt Cindy doesn't know how old she is, but rather thinks she is the same age as Major Estes. Indeed, she would much rather think this.

"Me'n the Major ain't a botherin' our haids about how many years we's been livin'," she said to Billy. "We's as ol' as we's spry, an' that's a whole heap younger than plenty er them what air always a slightin' their wuck an' dressin' up in these here one piece tut-tut dresses an' goin' jazzin'. She's a fat fool, that there Sarah Jane. I'm a wonderin' how Mrs. Garner puts up with her all these years. She done shoot off her mouf ter me 'bout a tut-tut dress bein' slumberizin'. I up an' tol' her it ought ter be 'cause it looks

ernough lak a night shirt. She better stay home some nights an' raise her dough as well as that there Benny Dick. Po' Mr. Garner ain't had nothin' but dry toast or het over biscuit fer his breakfust since Sarah Jane got that one piece dress an' took ter jazzin'. So much dry toast ain't good fer folkses' innards. Liable ter make 'em crackle lak walkin' in the woods in November. I say give the men folks plenty er good, hot, rizen rolls if you want ter keep 'em at home. You don't find our Major trapsin' off ter lodges an' 'ventions an' gulf turniments an' sich, lak Mr. Garner. An' why is it? I arsk you why?"

"I reckon he thinks too much of Aunt Minerva an' Jo, an' me, too," said Billy.

"Pshaw! Nothin' of the kind! I 'low Mr. Garner thinks jes' as much of pretty little Mrs. Garner as the Major does of Miss Minerva. An' outlandish as it may

seem, I reckon he loves that there limb of Satan of a Jimmy as much as the Major does you an' Josephine. 'Tain't nothin' but dry toast an' het over biscuit what makes Mr. Garner be sich a jiner. It's good eatin's, 'specially good on-time breakfuses what holts men ter they marriage vows."

Billy was having a snack on the back porch, the snack he loved best — a thick slice of bread, generously spread with butter and dark brown sugar. Billy had arrived at the age when many snacks were necessary. No matter how many the luncheons or how thick the slice or how generous the spread, regular meal time found the boy as empty as a gourd. The more he ate the taller and thinner he grew, much to Aunt Cindy's disgust.

"Looks lak you eat so much it makes you po' ter carry it," Aunt Cindy continued as she spread another slice, this time with

butter and sugar enough to put at least an extra pound on the boy. "Feedin' you, Billy, is lak pourin' water down a rat hole. Yo' legs are sho' hollow an' yo' stomic is a bottomless pit. I ain't begrudgin' you yo' victuals, honey, but I am jes' kinder oneasy 'bout you. I'm wonderin' if'n Miss Minerva ain't been orderin' too much macaroni an' fergetti fer the meals here lately. It mought be that when folks eat too much er that long skinny stuff they gits ter pertakin' of the nature of they nourishment."

Billy gazed ruefully at his long legs.

"They do look like macaroni, Aunt Cindy. I wish they wouldn't." The boy sighed tragically.

"Now, honey, don't you grieve. Them there legs is straight an' strong, an' befo' long they'll begin ter make out ter grow a little wider. If legs mus' 'semble victuals they much better 'semble macaroni than

sweet taters, the way that there Jimmy Garner's does."

"What have I been doing now?" demanded Jimmy as he climbed over the side railing of the porch. "Somebody's all the time saying I been doing something when I don't know what it is."

"You haven't been doing anything. It was your legs," grinned Billy.

"Well I reckon I'm responsible for my legs, and if my legs have got into mischief I must have gone along with them. Of course I might have been walking in my sleep, the way I do sometimes, and then I ain't to be held accountable. Yessum, Aunt Cindy, thank you kindly, I'd like some breadanbutteranbrownsugar b e t t e r than anything in the world. Of course I know you were going to ask me to have some. You are so much kinder to poor hungry boys than Sarah Jane," he added

slyly. "Sarah Jane wouldn't feed a fellow on the back porch for nothin' — unless it was Benny Dick. She sees to it that her own colt gets all the fodder. I wish my mother had somebody like you, Aunt Cindy."

Aunt Cindy beamed responsively at the compliment and immediately cut and spread a generous slice for the wily Jimmy.

"Th'ain't nothin' like breadanbutteranbrownsugar," mumbled Jimmy, his mouth full of that delectable concoction. "It beats apple butter an' it beats blackberry jam, even when the butter sticks up through the jam — an' that's goin' some. Ummmm! It looks good an' it tastes good an' it feels good a goin' down, an' it sticks to your ribs after it gets down."

"Howcome what you eats don't make you grow lengthwise some, Jimmy? Looks lak all yo' nourishment goes sidewise an'

all Billy's goes lengthwise," asked Aunt Cindy, her words bubbling their way through one of her delicious chuckles. Nobody ever laughed with quite the enjoyment of old Aunt Cindy. Her merriment would begin low down in her capacious stomach and would rumble happily in visible billows as it rose to the surface, finally breaking in a chortling bubble of delight. "You'n Billy oughter be mixed up an' rolled out an' cut up in two batches an' you'd make a right likely couple."

"Aw, shucks, Aunt Cindy," blustered Jimmy. "You just wait. I ain't got started to growin' yet. When I onct get started I'm gonter be the tallest boy in Tennessee. I don't want to grow until I'm old enough to put on long pants. My mamma says she won't let me put 'em on until I'm fifteen or maybe sixteen. My mamma's the bossiest woman 'bout boys'

pants. I reckon when we put on long pants, Billy, ol' Lina 'n Frances won't be such turnedupnosed peacocks about us. Those girls make me tired. Ain't we four been playin' around together forever, Billy?"

"Yes, almost since we were born."

"An' now what do the sillies do but swish their old skirts an' toss their curls when they see us comin'—either that or make out they don't see us. I can't see what's eatin' the geese."

"They think they're too old for us," said Billy. "Aunt Minerva says girls do get old faster than boys, but I think it is all foolishness. We are all four of us more or less fourteen an' we are in the same class at high school. I can't see that there is any more difference between us than there used to be when we first started to school. 'Member the whooping-cough school, Jimmy?"

"Sure! 'Member the time you an' ol' Lina 'n Frances an' I got married, with Wilkes Booth Lincoln playin' preacher?"

"Yes, an' the time all of us got arrested for stealing Aunt Minerva's baby? Gee, it looks like when two girls got married to two fellows an' got arrested with them an' all, an' then pretty near went to jail with them, that it's mighty snide of them to go an' outgrow the fellows. I reckon when we get to be long panters they'll remember we are living."

"Yes," agreed Jimmy, "an' when they remember me I'm gonter forget them. They make me sick. I heard that ol' Lina at the Sunday School picnic tellin' a bumpy faced boy that was pretty near a man didn't he think I was a cute kid. Cute your grandmother! She sounded like she thought I was a pup, er a baby er somepin'. They weren't too old for us that time they

invited theirselves to go down to the plantation the time there wasn't any diphtheria in town. Not that I'm mindin'—not a bit of it. Frances Black got ruined for me from the time the women took to votin' an' she got it in her head that she was gonter be president some day. As for ol' Lina Hamilton, she's just a wishy-washy, namby-pamby, struck-up silly. I reckon Lina first took the notion she was too grown-up for us, because she always was an airy piece, an' then Frances is just mean enough an' smarty enough to pretend she thinks so too. I betcher this minute that in her hateful ol' heart Frances would rather be playin' with us than walkin' up an' down the street with her arm around Lina's waist pretendin' they've got secrets."

The word secret electrified Billy. "I got a secret," he whispered. "Come on out to the swing so Aunt Cindy won't hear.

I betcher if Frances knew what it was, wild horses and Lina couldn't hold her back from joining us. I reckon if Wilkes Booth Lincoln knew, he wouldn't wait till September but would hurry back from visiting his mother, Peruny Pearline, down to the plantation. There's nobody in on it but you an' Tom Collins an' me."

"Aw, you all time draggin' in Tom Collins, Billy. Why don't you let it be yours an' mine an' leave out Tom?"

"Tom's gotter be in it because it is his secret first an' he knows how to do it—leastways he most knows. Fact is, he's gonter furnish the brains an' you an' I have gotter hustle out an' raise the dough. We gotter get 'bout ten dollars an' eighty-five cents."

"Gee! Let me furinsh the brains. I got more brains'n money," cried Jimmy. "You needn't say I'm mighty poor either,

because I said it first. But one thing sure, I got too many brains to hustle out for money until I know what it's for."

"It's a radio!" whispered Billy. "Tom most knows how to build one, but his old man took all the savings Tom's been hiding in the cracked tea pot for months and months — took it and got so dead drunk Tom most hoped he never would come to. Anyhow Tom can't furnish anything but brains now, so he kinder thought you'n me might finance his venture."

"But a radio set costs two hundred and fifty dollars," gasped Jimmy. "I heard my papa say so."

"But Tom can build one for ten dollars and eighty cents an' it is up to us to get the money."

CHAPTER II

TOM COLLINS' SCRAP HOUSE

MISS MINERVA never had approved of Tom Collins as a companion for her nephew. She could not be persuaded that Tom was not disreputable himself, since his family was so far from respectable — if, indeed, old Collins could be called a family. Tom did not look upon his father as a family at all but merely as a necessary evil who was always around when he wasn't wanted; always around and usually drunk.

Miss Minerva was really quite willing to do what she called her "Christian duty" in regard to the neglected boy, but Christian duty did not include welcoming the ragged Tom into her social

circle. She was more than willing to pray for him, quite willing to give more than her share when the sewing society took up a collection to buy Tom suitable clothes for Sunday School, and she even offered to mend his ragged clothes so that he might be more respectable looking on week days. But it was always under protest that Billy was allowed to spend any time in the company of the disreputably connected youth.

The Major, on the other hand, liked Tom and never missed an opportunity to help and encourage him.

"He can't hurt Billy, my dear," he said to his wife, "and Billy can help him a great deal."

But Aunt Minerva remembered too well the incident of Billy's learning to swear under the tutelage of Tom, and was slow to agree with her dear husband. The colorful words which had poured from the

innocent lips of her little nephew had been burnt on her brain. Although Billy had proudly boasted that he had made them all up himself, she felt that Tom had been to blame for what Billy had called "a right sweet cuss." At any rate Tom was poor white and Billy was an aristocrat, and according to Mrs. Estes, that was argument enough.

It made very little difference to Tom Collins whether Billy's aunt liked him or not. He didn't like her very much and he saw no reason why she should like him. He was not at all grateful to her for wanting to mend his clothes. He just tore them again in his tramps through the briars hunting specimens. Nor was he grateful to the sewing society for taking up a donation so that he might be fit for Sunday School. He did not mind going to Sunday School when it was raining or snowing or

sleeting too hard for the woods to be pleasant, but those times were not often. Tom's Sunday clothes were in danger of being outgrown before they were outworn. As for the prayers, the thought of them made him vaguely uneasy. The fact that Miss Minerva remembered him in her nightly orisons had been divulged by the artless prattle of Josephine.

"My mother prays and prays for God to make you a good boy, Tom," she had told him.

Tom adored Josephine and looked upon her as a rare specimen to be guarded with care, and Josephine in turn loved Tom and looked upon him as her very own raggedy boy. Had he not found her Flumpy for her, that curliest and sweetest of little dogs?

"She keeps on asking Him," Josephine continued. "If I kept on asking her some-

thing she'd tell me 'Once is enough, my darling. Mother will grant your request if it seems wise, but there is no use in worrying her with such 'sistance.' That's what she says, but I know mighty well that if I keep on a-nagging she'll let me have my way to get rid of me. I reckon she knows that about God, just as I know that about her. I reckon if she keeps on praying for you, Tom, you'll get so good Flumpy won't know you an' he'll growl at you an' maybe up an' bite you."

That was what had caused Tom's uneasiness; the possibility of Mrs. Estes's prayers being answered and of his becoming a good boy according to that lady's standards. He would not have minded the Major's praying for him. In fact, the way the Major talked to Tom seemed almost like a prayer to the boy. He didn't expect a fellow to be always washing his neck

and to leave off swearing over night. Tom gathered that the Major thought it advisable for boys to wash necks when the time came to wash them and that swearing was a foolish habit, but like all habits, not so easy to break as perfect ladies imagined.

"Mighty few things are worth swearing about," the old gentleman had told the boy. "Save your oaths for something worth while and you will be astonished to see how seldom you will need them. Constant swearing is like constant loud speaking or threatening. It loses its force and becomes meaningless and silly."

Now the one thing that Tom hated above all others was silliness. Certainly he did not want his friend, the Major, to look upon him as silly, so when the ugly words rose to his lips he did his best to swallow them. After all, they did not mean much and were more or less useless. Of course,

as the Major had humorously indicated, the time might come when he would need a few cuss words and they were there for use in case of emergency.

Tom had built a house of materials salvaged from the town dump, and this house had grown with his needs. A room had been added to the original structure, a room large enough to hold all of the specimens of butterflies, beetles and birds' eggs that Tom had collected. The addition also boasted a rough rock chimney, an open fireplace, and a real window with real glass. Tom was inordinately proud of his window and his chimney. Sometimes he would make a fire in the roughly constructed fireplace and then go out-doors and peep through the real panes of glass just to see how cozy and fine his room looked. The chimney drew, too; as chimneys sometimes will in spite of all rules of construction

being violated. Many a fireplace in a grand mansion smokes and smokes, even though the best experts in flue construction be brought into consultation. Billy and Jimmy had watched the building of the chimney with awe and admiration.

"How do you know how?" asked Billy.

"I don't know how," grinned Tom. "I jes' guesses how. Chimbleys are nothin' but guess work anyhow. Some er them draws an' some er them don't draw. It's kinder like echoes. Nobody can't ever tell where echoes will fly back at you jes' like smoke in a chimbly. I'm kinder makin' sure 'bout this chimbly by spittin' in the mortar every time I stirs it up an' sayin' 'skookum'."

Finally the great day came when the flue was to be tested. Billy and Jimmy drove Brownie over to The Dump for the celebration, Josephine wedged in between

them with Flumpy clasped tightly in her arms. As they approached the strangely misshapen structure known as Tom's House, Josephine squealed with delight.

"Look, look! There's smoke curlin' up out of Tom's chimbly; curlin' up jes' as nachel as folkses smoke. Oh, I'm so glad!"

A smiling Tom, with his face washed and his mop of black hair smoothed a little in front, met the guests at the door.

"I couldn't wait to light her up," he said. "I couldn't sleep last night for worryin' would she or wouldn't she. I'd a got up an' tested her if I had a been sure the mortar was dried out good."

"And does she draw?" asked Billy.

"Does she! Oh boy! I tell you she draws so good I'm skeered for Josephine to let Flumpy set on the hearth. That little purp might get drawed up the chimbly."

In his childhood Tom Collins had spent two years in the primer class. The teacher had almost given him up as a bad job. It had seemed impossible to teach him his letters, to say nothing of reading and writing. Suddenly, over night, he knew his letters and was reading and soon outstripped the class in arithmetic.

"I'd a been readin' long time before if I'd a knowd that you could find out things beside A B ab, an' 'The dog ran the cat.' Course the dog ran the cat — leastways if it was any kind er dog wuth ownin'. As for A B ab — what's a ab anyhow? 'Rithmetic ain't nothin' but plain sense, but teachers mostly get it mighty mixed up an' up-side-down. What's the use in tellin' a fellow all kinds of things he's been a knowin' ever since he could see, an' then makin' a fellow tell it back like multiplication tables an' sech foolishness?"

This was Tom's verdict when he graduated from the primer to the first reader and on to the second and third, and it was still his opinion now that he was in high school. He felt that too much A B ab was taught; too much stress put upon self evident facts, such as dogs running cats and two and two making four. Spelling was always an abomination to Tom. He looked upon it merely as a means toward an end and the shorter the cut, and the easier the road, the better. What differnce did it make how a word was spelled if it conveyed the proper meaning? History, according to Tom, was nothing but stupid foolishness — dreary tales of dull old kings who had lived and died for the express purpose of making boys learn their dates.

There were two reasons why Tom was endeavoring to get an education. The first was that Billy and the Major and old Mr.

Griggs wanted him to, and the second was that his father did not want him to. Old Collins saw no reason for his son's knowing more than he did, and accordingly put every obstacle in the way of Tom's schooling. Whenever he was sober enough to talk, his conversation consisted in invectives against education.

"Goldarned foolishness!" he would storm. "Better larn him to larn how to make a living. Here he is, a great big most grown man, a living on a poor old feeble veteran's pension doled out to him by a ongrateful gov'ment. Gov'ments and children are all alike — ongrateful as sarpents teeth."

Old Collins' remarks were addressed to the Widow Leary, his next door neighbor, whose yard separated his property from the town dump. The Widow Leary was ever ready to listen to criticism of man

or beast, although her policy was to speak a good word for the absent. It gave her

the reputation of being kindly disposed without interfering in the least with the gossip imparted to her willing ear.

"Now, now, neighborrr!" she burred.

"Tom is afterr getting book larnin' so's he can be a credit to yez — though sore it would be makin' me to have one of my own flish an' blood trra-apsin' through the woods with a naygerr. Yes, I'm schpeakin' of that black boy that Mrs. Estes is rraisin'. They do say it is her ol' fool of a husband that is educatin' the naygerr. They let their nephew play arroun' with that Wilkes Lincoln same as if he was white. I ain't had any use a tall furr that family since they bought my foine goat an' kep' him all those weeks an' thin threw him back on my hands — me a poorr widder woman at that."

"And didn't pay you for him?" queried old Collins, wonderingly.

"Of course they paid me the sellin' price, but no rint at all arfter keepin' him an' usin' him so sore. He was that glad to get back to me 'twas pitiable. I let

bygones be bygones, so glad was I to have my goat back on the dump. An' the poorr critter was that glad that it wasn't no time before he over et an' died a sad, sad, death, God rest his sowl! He was a good goat an' heaps of comp'ny for a lone, lorn widder woman."

Whenever the Widow Leary got on the subject of being a poor, lone, lorn widow, old Collins shied. He had noticed that she usually stressed her loneness and lornness soon after he mentioned his pension. The veteran was quite aware of the fact that the women who lived in the neighborhood, widows, near widows and spinsters, were much interested in his pension and, because of it, in him. The Dump, as the locality was called, could not bear the thought of the pension dying with the pensioner; and if old Collins kept up the constant swilling of moonshine liquor, no doubt

he would soon pass on. All of the ladies agreed that it was a pity that some one among them should not "carry on," marry the old reprobate and save the monthly stipend for the glory of The Dump. Be it said to their credit that few among them would have been willing to take the pensioner for better or worse even for the sake of the pension.

The Widow Leary had no such scruples. To be sure Collins was a very dirty, drunken old man, but the departed Leary had been far from a cleanly saint.

"He wouldn't be arfterr livin' verry long," she said to herself as old Collins shambled off toward his tumbled down home. "I could keep a few pigs in a lot that big, what with the nice brrook for thim to make a hog wallow in. A home with no rint to pay would be foine in my ol' age, an' a grand pinsion would set me

up so that I could live loike a lady. As forr that Tawm, I'd sind him kitin'; him with his book larnin' an' his silly bit house an' his runnin' around with naygerrs, huntin' birds' eggs an' the loike in the woods. Yis, I'd send him kitin', an' what's morre I'd bundle off that naygerr, Fat Molly. She shouldn't cook for me — not even off an' on the way she does for him. I'm thinkin' once I git ol' Collins in a marryin' mood he won't last long — not long."

Most of the inhabitants of The Dump were "renters." In fact, Old Collins was the only member of the landed gentry in the neighborhood. The place had been left to Tom by his mother's aunt, who had lived there long before The Dump came into existence. No one in the town but Old Collins and the Recorder of Deeds, and one young lawyer who had the job of running down the title for a prospective

buyer, had ever known that young Tom was the rightful heir to the tumble down house and the big yard with its pleasant bit of grass and pretty little brook that bubbled up from a natural spring at the foot of the slope and meandered under the fence to lose itself in the debris of the town dump. Old Collins kept his information to himself. The Recorder of that particular deed had died and the young lawyer had other things to occupy him besides who owned the title to that piece of property. He was now Judge Turpin of the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court and the inhabitants of The Dump were frequent visitors in his court.

The knowledge that he was not the real owner of his home was a constant thorn in the flesh of Old Collins. The neighbors all thought he was, and by rights should be. Bad cess to his wife's relations

who would leave property right over his head to a good-for-nothing scamp of a boy who was no help at all but a hindrance!

Sometimes Old Collins considered letting the taxes get so far in arrears that the place would be sold, but he was shrewd enough to know that this would establish Tom's ownership and he, Old Collins, would lose caste in the eyes of the neighbors, including the designing widows, near widows and spinsters. He well knew that it was the bit of property, as well as the pension, that was interesting the ladies. Suppose they found out! Suppose Tom found out! That would mean that he would have to leave off beating Tom altogether. The beatings now were few and hardly worthy of the name, as his husky son usually disregarded them or even laughed at them. However, they served as an outlet to a drink crazed brain. It

would be difficut to give up the habit, but it would be a mortifying experience if Tom, in the midst of a drubbing, should taunt him with the fact that he let his father remain in the house only on sufferance.

Above all, he would hate for Fat Molly to find out that Tom was the proprietor. Fat Molly was uncertain, but she did come sometimes and when she came she cooked enough to last several days and she cleaned up after a fashion, charging only a pittance but with the privilege of "totin'." He knew full well that Fat Molly held on to the job because he had slyly given her to understand that he would will her the lower end of the yard, the part with the spring, which she coveted for the same reason as Mrs. Leary. It was an ideal place for a hog-wallow.

The old man had ever in his mind the

fear that he might let the cat out of the bag himself during one of his drunken sprees. Holding the thought as he did, it was little wonder that whenever he was under the influence of liquor his cry was always, "'Tain't hisn! It's mine! It's mine! Don't let him take it! Give it to me!" This he would mumble over and over until poor Tom would beg Fat Molly to come over and look after his father and then would take refuge in his own beloved little house, where he could be at peace and shut out the hateful sounds.

CHAPTER III

MISS MINERVA GOES VISITING

IT IS astonishing how long it takes to make or save ten dollars and eighty cents, the sum determined on by Tom as necessary for the materials for a proper radio set.

"Might as well have it good while we are about it," he said. "And the nickel an' dime store sells swell stuff. Course we can draw in some on the price if we can kinder borrow a few things. Some things we'll jes' haveter borrow even at ten eighty—things like batteries. Where you gonter set it up, Billy?"

"In the woodhouse attic, I reckon. Aunt Minerva says I can have it for a kinder club room. Wilkes Booth Lincoln

don't have to sleep there any more since Maje built him a lean-to on Aunt Cindy's house. I reckon Wilkes Booth Lincoln ain't gonter like his new room near as much as his old one, but Aunt Cindy talked the Major into getting this room built because she said it was too hard on her to have to wake Nicky up in the morning when he is up in the woodhouse attic. You see, she's got so fat she can't get up the steps an' she says she can holler herself hoarse an' pretty near knock the steps down an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln won't hear her or, if he does, won't heed her. Aunt Cindy's best indoor sport is waking up Nicky."

"But see here, Billy Hill," objected Jimmy. "I can't see why I've gotter help raise ten dollars an' eighty cents just to improve Miss Minerva's Major's property. If it's gonter be in her woodhouse attic, I don't see where I come in."

"All right, Jimmy, let's put it on your lot," agreed Billy, readily. "Where do you want to put it? How about your room? How about the comp'ny room? Maybe Sarah Jane would let us get up in the attic over her cabin. She never has, but then she might. S'pose you ask her." Billy's eyes were twinkling.

"Aw shucks, Billy! You are all the time expecting me to have radio sets where you know my mother ain't gonter let me. We can't have any fun since old Aunt Pauline Pirtle came to visit us. She's my great aunt, my Mamma's aunt once removed. We have to be mighty particular about great Aunt Pauline. I've got a secret why we have to be so particular, but I ain't tellin'—even if you ask and ask."

"I'm not gonter ask if it's a secret, but how about having the radio set up in Sarah Jane's attic?"

"Now, Billy, you're talkin' foolishness. That ol' Sarah Jane would see me et up by cannibals before she'd let me get up in her attic. I reckon that woman must have something up in that old attic she's got no business having there because she's all the time so particular about boys going up there. You have the radio over on your side of the fence. It'll be all right with me. I just think I ought to be consulted some when I was the first one thought of having a radio."

"But you weren't," replied Billy, who was but human and must sometimes get the credit for starting things. "I told you about it that morning Aunt Cindy was giving us breadanbutteranbrownsugar out on the back porch."

"I never said you din't tell me. I never said a thing about tellin'. I said I thought about it first and I did. I been thinkin'

about it a long time an' was kinder waitin' to be sure before I mentioned it. You don't know all the things I think about, Billy Hill."

Billy laughed and so did Tom, who found Jimmy as amusing as a collie pup or a pet raccoon.

"I guess he doesn't," said Tom. "But I'm thinkin' sooner or later he can tell, because I'm inventin' a think tank and some day I'm gonter catch Jimmy an' put him in it an' then we can tell 'zactly what he's thinkin' about."

"I reckon the first thing you'll see me a thinkin' is that you are a whopper. But this ain't gettin' the money. How much you got now, Billy?" asked Jimmy, who was restored to perfect good humor in the twinkling of an eye.

"I got three dollars an' eighteen cents," said Billy woefully. "I split kindlin' this

morning for Aunt Cindy until I got blisters and Aunt Minerva didn't give me but fifteen cents. While Nicky is down on the plantation I thought I'd pick up a little change doing some of his work. It sho' does pay po'ly. I wish Lina 'n Frances weren't so standoffish here lately. I tell you, Frances was sho' a good hand at gettin' up schemes for making money. 'Member the time she got up the rummage sale?"

"Course I 'member, cept'n I got it up," said Jimmy. "Frances only took up my idea. She was the grabbies' girl about claimin' credit."

"Well, I wish she would grab off some more credit an' get up another scheme so we could raise the rest of the radio money. How about askin' her?" suggested Billy.

"Then you can count me out," put in Tom. "I like little Josephine, but all the

other girls give me a pain. I guess that there Hamilton girl and that there Black girl would no more come around where I was than they would where there was a smallpox case."

"Not Frances," said Billy. "Frances is real democratic."

"Well, Pap's a Republican so I reckon that's settled," grinned Tom. "And that there Mrs. Hamilton as good as let me know that her precious Lina was too good for me even to speak to. So if they are goin' to be in on the radio, then good-bye, boys, I'm out."

"Aw, whose gonter ask any ol' girls?" stormed Jimmy. "Not me! What's the reason we can't raise the money ourselves? I reckon I've got as much sense as any girls that ever was. Let's borrow Brownie an' be ragsanoliron men an' see what we can raise. It won't make any difference if

Brownie is slow when he's a ragsanoliron horse. Do you reckon Jo'l lend him?"

"Sure she would, but it so happens she is goin' on a trip to Loui'ville to-morrow with Aunt Minerva so we can borrow him without even asking her. Maje an' I are going to bach while Aunt Minerva an' Jo are away. Aunt Cindy is going to big meetin' an' Maje an' I are goin' to eat at the hotel until they get back. I think it's great."

"It takes capital to be ragsanolironcopperanbrass men," said Tom, enlarging the working scope. "I've been 'em an' I know. I reckon you all ain't got enough ahead yet to be investin'. Folks don't give away rags an' such."

"Gee! I never thought of that," wailed Jimmy.

"Well, what are we gonter do?" asked Billy.

"You might go scratch in the dump pile," suggested Tom. "There is lots of competition in scratchin' in the dump pile, but sometimes luck is with you an' you make a real find. I ain't never been a hand at scratchin'. Guess I been livin' too clost to it to get the habit. Fat Molly's always diggin' around the dump. She got the habit owin' to her sister's husband findin' a pretty near diamond ring onct."

Miss Minerva had many misgivings in regard to leaving her husband and nephew alone, defenseless and cookless even for two short weeks, but the Major reminded her that he had managed to eat at the hotel for many long years and could do it again without encountering any great hardship.

"Just promise not to leave me out in the cold too long, my dear, not as long as you did before." The Major's refer-

ence was to the many years he had courted Miss Minerva to no avail.

"Only two weeks, Joseph," blushed Miss Minerva. "I am sure you are to be trusted—"

"Well, I should hope so," laughed her husband.

"I mean trusted not to eat all the different kinds of desserts at one time. But I am uneasy about Billy. He is at a very uncertain age. I have made out a list of the things he should not do while I am away. I shall put the list on his dresser so he can see it to-night. Of course I shall not make him promise not to do these things, but nevertheless I shall feel he is in honor bound to consider my feelings in the matter."

The Major's eyes twinkled. He remembered what Aunt Cindy had said about her mistress:

"Miss Minerva kin be a wedded wife with a ring on her finger and a baby besides, but she's a ol' maid yit."

"Perhaps Aunt Cindy was right," thought the Major, and then aloud, "I

am sure Billy will be a good boy, Minerva, but I wouldn't push him too hard if I were you."

And so Miss Minerva and her precious Josephine boarded the train for Louisville and Aunt Cindy caught the new motor bus

that would land her within a few miles of the plantation. So it was that Billy and the Major were left to bach for two blissful weeks; at least Billy thought they would be blissful.

Billy wished Wilkes Booth Lincoln might have been there to share his emancipation from petticoat rule, but the colored boy had been forced to spend some time with his mother, Peruny Pearline, who for some reason best known to herself had suddenly decided that her son must come home. Her pretext was that she missed him greatly and her mother heart was hungering for him. Knowing Peruny Pearline and her tendency to feel that when she had once given birth to a baby her responsibility to her offspring ceased, Aunt Cindy and Billy and Wilkes Booth Lincoln were sure that the wily Peruny had something else up her sleeve.

It was this, as well as "Big Meeting," that was calling Aunt Cindy down to the plantation. That worthy old woman was determined that Peruny Pearline shouldn't put anything over on her or the Major. She intended to fathom the reason for the sudden interest shown by the hitherto neglectful mother. She also intended to bring Wilkes Booth Lincoln back with her. The Major had instructed her to say nothing about the law, except as a last resort, but if Peruny Pearline showed a tendency to hang on to her son, then she was to be reminded that the boy had been legally adopted by the Major — literally handed over to him.

Aunt Cindy reserved to herself the privilege of imposing upon Wilkes Booth Lincoln. She had no idea of sharing that privilege with the boy's own mother. For about eight years she had been

dictator, expending all her energy on raising the boy according to her ideas of how a colored boy should be raised. Now that he was almost raised, it would be hard to have him snatched from her rule. She was going down to the plantation prepared to carry matters with a high hand.

Billy gave a sigh of relief when the last female had departed and the last explicit directions had gone in one of his ears and out of the other. Even Josephine must tell him some half dozen times not to forget that her white rabbits liked lettuce leaves and please to remember to water the precious things. The idea of thinking he would be likely to forget to feed and water dumb creatures! Besides, Sam Lamb was also in charge of the rabbits, along with the Major's horse and Brownie and the fresh cow with the new calf.

Aunt Cindy had told him over and over

something about bath towels, and bread in the bread-box in case he got hungry between times, and apple butter that was already opened, and not to spill brown sugar in the pantry, and if he saw any signs of ants — if he did spill sugar — to sprinkle some borax over where he had spilled the sugar. Also she cautioned him to keep an eye open for Sarah Jane and mark whether she wore her one piece tut-tut. As for Aunt Minerva, there was nothing she didn't tell him except what she told the Major. They must lock up and unlock, and take in the ice and not take in the ice, and air the attic and close the windows all over the house in case of sudden storms, and say their prayers and go to church, et cetera, et cetera.

"Whew!" ejaculated Billy. "Aunt Minerva must think we are crazy — without sense enough to come in outer the rain.

Are you gonter do all the things she told you to, Major?"

The Major chuckled. "Well, my son, my intentions were of the best, but I am very much afraid I have already forgotten some of the things I was to do, and all the things I was not to do in your Aunt Minerva's absence. I find that constant reiterations leave my mind a blank. Nevertheless, I am sure we can please her if we just do our duty as we see it until her return."

Billy went to his room to slick up a bit before the mid-day dinner that he was to have at the hotel with the Major. In his heart was a glow of gratitude that the Major was as he was. Understanding a fellow and all! Tolerant of the women, but superior to them. Gee, but it was going to be fun, eating at the hotel!

As he brushed his hair that still would

curl in spite of all the slicking he could give it, he saw, stuck on his pin cushion, a letter addressed to him in Miss Minerva's unmistakable writing.

"What now?" he gloomed. "Maybe it's a present — a kind of bonus that will help out the radio . . . No such luck! More directions about what not to do! Don't leave a ring around the bath tub. Don't go fishing while she's gone. Don't let Jimmy Garner play on the piano. As though he wanted to! Don't leave the ice box open. Don't shoot bows and arrows in the house. When I haven't had a bow-anarrow since I can remember! Don't forget when Sunday comes. Don't put on clean clothes over dirty ones. I never did that but once and Aunt Minerva acts as if it was a habit! Don't eat more than one kind of pie at a time at the hotel. Remember what a delicate stomic I have.

Delicate much! I haven't had a upset since the time I got the vermifuge candy down at the plantation. Aunt Minerva is sure some rememberer. She must think I've got some big mouth if I can bite two kinds of pies at a time. Well, there's one thing she forgot to mention, and that was scratchin' in the dump. I wonder how come she left that out."

CHAPTER IV

FAT MOLLY

WHATCHER scratch in a dump with?" Jimmy asked Billy, as immediately after breakfast on the morning following the departure of Billy's females the boys got ready for their treasure hunt. They had put on their oldest and shabbiest clothes, and their hats vied in shapelessness with the one worn by Tom Collins.

"Some use hooks an' some rakes an' some just go to it with their hands. That's what Tom says. I'm thinking about borrowin' Aunt Cindy's sifter. Looks to me like that oughter be a good plan."

"I wish ol' Sarah Jane would go on a trip so's I could get her sifter. Not her! She's the stickin'est around cook there is.

I wish't she would take her ol' kid an go off to 'Big Meetin'. She sure needs a little sanctifyin'. If she'd take a holiday maybe my mamma an' papa would eat at the hotel, too. How many kinds of pie did you say they had yesterday?"

"Four, besides tapico puddin' an' peach ice cream. I didn't eat any tapico puddin'. I took one piece of pie at a time. That was according to Aunt Minerva's orders. I reckon what scratchin' I do in the dump will haveter be done in the morning. I can't bend over after I get through with all of that hotel dinner. I'd kinda like to live there all the time."

The boys decided to drive Brownie, thinking the little pony carriage would be handy for carting back the spoils of digging. Not being quite sure what implements would be most efficacious, they put in the back of the carriage a pick, shovel,

hoe, rake, two gunny sacks and Aunt Cindy's prized flour sifter.

"I reckon we'll be the best scratchers on the dump," said Jimmy. "An' we'd better take too many things to dig with an' plenty of gunny sacks rather'n run short of such things."

They drew rein at Tom Collins's house and whistled shrilly for their partner.

"Hiyer?" said Tom as he shambled out to the yard gate.

"Hiyer! C'mon, let's begin scratchin'," called Jimmy.

"I ain't a scratchin'," drawled Tom. "Didn't I tell yer I ain't never been no hand at scratchin' in the dump. I'm gonter do head an' hand work on this radio contrapshun, but you two are gonter finance it."

"That's so, Jimmy," said Billy. "Tom never was gonter scratch. With what

you've got an' what I've got, we won't need but two dollars an' seventy three cents to make up the mun. The sooner we get to scratchin' the better."

"Well, s'long!" from Tom. "I'll tell you one thing 'bout scratchin'—thain't never no use in scratchin' after Fat Molly or Hippity Hop Pete. Them two don't never miss a trick. They're ol' hands at diggin' an' I reckon they must be lucky or they'd stop. They're pow'ful grabby, too, so if you strike a find don't let on or they'll do you out of it."

The Dump had originally been a ravine, a great gash in a hill, softly sloping down to a creek. The rubbish discarded by the citizens had been carted over and thrown down this gully until gradually it had been filled. Now, instead of a valley, it was a hill and bade fair to become a mountain unless the people of the town chose

another place in which to deposit their debris.

Early morning was not a popular time for digging in the discard because the ash and trash carts usually were not emptied until afternoon. But there were always a few devotees, with the gambler's spirit, who felt that luck might be with them early and late. Fat Molly and Hippity Hop Pete were there before the boys.

Fat Molly was a negress. She was six feet three inches high and weighed an even three hundred pounds. Her hands, had she cared to glove them, would have taken size twelve and her feet demanded shoes so huge that no number was given. She made them herself from old leather valises and suit cases found on the dump. It was an unwritten law of the scratchers and rag pickers that all discarded leather goods belonged to Fat Molly. She was

supposed to offer legal tender to the finder of the coveted leather in the shape of some commodity such as lead, iron, brass or old shoes that might fit some one with a normal foot.

Fat Molly's huge frame was made to seem larger because of the ridiculous smallness of her head. It hardly seemed like a head at all but a funny little excrescence that had grown on the body. It might have belonged to a child of three, except that the expression in the black shoe-button eyes was knowing and shrewd, even calculating. The head was small for the body and the nose was even smaller in proportion to the head. In fact, Fat Molly might have been said to have no nose at all, merely nostrils. She had a broad, friendly mouth, however, and strong, white teeth ever on the grin. When the dress known as a Mother Hubbard was in vogue, Fat

Molly had adopted it as peculiarly fitting to her style and she had never deviated from the pattern in more than forty years. On her tiny head she always wore a little boy's sailor hat with gay ribbon streamers and a gilt anchor.

Hippity Hop Pete was a little old white man who had limped down from the mountains so many years ago that nobody remembered when it was. With the aid of a crutch and a stick and a peg leg, he had finally found his way to the town and settled himself on The Dump in a house built of odds and ends from the town's discard. Pete's house had little more form than Tom's, and his chimney did not draw so well. But Hippity Hop spent very little time in his home. The precious hours must be given to feverish searching in the dump pile. How he lived no one knew, but it took very little provender to keep life in

such a tiny dried-up morsel of humanity. Of course he had no rent to pay, for he had built his own house on no man's land. If any man did own the dump pile he did not claim it; and Hippity Hop spent a blissful time, free from rent and tax collectors. His house was furnished with pickings from the dump pile and not a penny had it cost him.

The little old man had a system for searching in the ashes and rubbish, which he followed religiously, and he was as sure of its ultimate success as any gambler at Monte Carlo. This system was a great secret, which he imparted to no one, but Fat Molly would slyly watch him as he carefully measured off a space with a yard stick and staked out his claim for the day. Pete worked with a hook and small spade, the kind with which a child digs sand at the sea shore. Having marked out a series

of squares he then dug in circles, and after a day of labor his field of operation presented a kind of pattern in bas-relief. That was his system! Hippity Hop Pete carried a camp stool wherever he dug and seated himself gingerly so as not to break the pattern in the ashes.

Fat Molly always sat flat in the dirt, her huge feet stuck out straight in front of her. She wielded a long handled rake and a grubbing hoe. Her reach was unbelievably far. She sorted her findings as she unearthed them, piling them neatly around her bulky form; here a heap of rusty nails, there bits of china and glass, there rags and paper and varied treasures in the way of leaky pots and pans, worn out brushes, toothless combs, discarded millinery and shoes.

The time had been when Fat Molly and Hippity Hop Pete had been sworn enemies

as well as rivals. Rivals they still were, but war against a common enemy had forced them to declare a truce and even to

become friends. The enemy was the hoard of youngsters that at times infested their beloved dump. Boys, white boys, were the particular banes of their existence.

Fat Molly felt capable of coping with the youths of her own color, but when white boys came on the dump to plague the diggers it was indeed a problem to control them. Fat Molly had no use for white folks anyhow. The only reason she consented to cook for old Collins was that, according to her, "He was as mean as any nigger livin' an' jes' as onreg'lar." Tom she put up with because "He had no mo' raisin' than a low lifed nigger." Her only dealings among white persons had been with the lowest order of the poor whites. She had no regard for the "quality," never having lived with them or known them. Molly had been born in the midst of slavery, but of free parents. As was often the case in the southern states, what was known as a "free nigger" had no standing with the better class of his or her own race and was, in consequence, somewhat of an out-

cast. Much Fat Molly cared! She sought quality in her own race no more than in the white race; in fact, she much preferred what she designated as "a low down onery nigger" to a respectable one.

"Look yonder comin', Hippity!" she cried as she saw Billy and Jimmy, loaded with the accoutrement for a day on the dump pile, picking their way fastidiously through the debris to a spot they had decided upon as being advantageous. "White boys walkin' along like they owned our dump. I'll show 'em. Hi! You — you good-for-nothin' white boys, get out er here or I'll split yer open with this here rake er mine an' gouge out yo' eyes with this here ol' termatter can. What right is you got down here on my dump? Yes, mine! I tell yer it's mine — mine an' Hippity Hop Pete's. We done 'stablish squatter's rights here an' can't nobody come on our dump 'thout we

say so an' we ain't never gonter say so — not ter no white boys."

The boys paused a moment, not knowing just what dump pile etiquette demanded of them.

"Aw come on, Billy! She's nothin' but a fat ol' fool," blustered Jimmy. "What do you reckon we'd be doin' while she was bustin' us open with her rake an' gougin' our eyes out with a tomato can?"

But Billy was always for peace, if possible, and many years under Aunt Cindy's rule had trained him to be mannerly to all old persons and especially to old colored women. So Billy raised his battered hat and bowed politely.

"You must excuse us, Aunt Molly, we are not going to disturb you at all —"

"*Aunt* Molly! Don't you Aunt Molly me! I ain't yo' Aunt Molly nor nobody's Aunt Molly," screamed the irate negress.

"You ain't got no mo' right ter call me aunt than I is ter call you uncle. You an' that there fat boy jes take yo' selfs off er my dump pile an' don't come back. What you doin' down here anyhow?"

"Well, you see we want two dollars and seventy-three cents—"

"Whar did you lose it? Did it come out in ashes or jes' plain trash?" Molly had pulled herself up from her throne of rubbish and came striding towards the boys. Truly she was a fearsome figure, but no longer was she vindictive. Her little round face was wreathed in smiles and her voice and manner were suddenly kind and conciliatory. "Jes' tell Molly how come you los' all that money an' whar you los' it an' when."

"Oh, we haven' lost it," said Billy, "and nobody has that we know of—"

"Needn't tell me! You done spoke the

truf onct an' now you're a lyin'. When wa' you expectin' of the trash ter be emptied an' what part er town wa' it los' in? You mought jes' as well tell, 'cause befo' Gawd, Hippity an' me is gonter dig whar you digs."

"Delighted, I am sure!" said Billy, sweeping off his hat with the low bow of a movie hero in a costume play.

"Dee-lighted or not dee-lighted," piped up Hippity Hop Pete, "we-uns is a gonter dig whar you digs." He gathered his crutch, his stick, his hook and his tiny spade and joined Fat Molly.

"All right," said Jimmy. "We're gonter dig where we're at." He accordingly began with a right good will, scratching in the ashes like a terrier after a mole.

"Stop!" commanded Molly. "That ain't no way ter dig."

"That's the way I dig," grinned Jimmy.

"Here, Billy, get your sifter. We ain't got a minute to lose."

Jimmy dug and Billy sifted and then Billy dug and Jimmy sifted. Molly and Pete, somewhat nonplused, looked on in wonderment. They were curious to know why the boys had decided to dig in that particular spot. It was an old part of the dump. They were sure that every inch of it had already been dug in by them or by some other of the habituees. But from Jimmy's quick action, and Billy's compliance, it looked as though they had some information concerning that especial section. And from the careful sifting of the ashes they must be in search of an even greater treasure than two dollars and seventy-three cents.

Persistent digging and sifting disclosed nothing more valuable than rusty nails, innumerable clinkers, a baby's broken rattle

and a Barlow knife, minus a blade. Molly and Pete, fascinated by Jimmy's terrier-like digging, merely stood and watched the interlopers. They showed some excitement when the rattle was unearthed, but when it proved to be of rusty tin their interest died down.

"Well, Hippity, the day's a burnin' up an' I reckon we'd bes' git back ter wuck," said Molly reluctantly. "These white boys is plain idjits anyhow, a comin' down here so briskit an' tellin' us whar ter dig."

Hippity gave a high, shrill laugh and turned on his cane and crutch and went back to his system.

CHAPTER V

THE DUMP YIELDS TREASURE

THE sun was mounting high in the heavens and Billy and Jimmy continued to take turn about in digging and sifting. To the broken knife and rusty rattle had been added a set of false teeth and a mule shoe.

"That'll bring us luck," said Billy. "I wish I had brought my old rabbit foot. I useter always carry it 'round with me. Aunt Minerva says thain't nothin' in a rabbit foot, and maybe there ain't, but Wilkes Booth Lincoln and I sure did useter have luck fishin' an' everything. Next time we come we'll bring it."

"Thain't gonter be any next time for Jimmy Garner. I'm too fat for such pastime

as diggin' in a dump pile. Gee! I'm all of a muck of sweat. Let's stop an' call it half a day."

"Stop all right, but surely you ain't stoppin' for good, Jimmy Garner. We haven't found anything yet worth anything at all, 'ceptin' the false teeth, and I reckon Uncle Jimmy-jawed Jupiter would be right proud to get them. I ain't gonter give up until I dig up or sift out something sure enough valuable."

"Well, I'll come once more but it ain't my idea of fun. I reckon I'm 'bout the best digger there is, though. Just watch what a hole I can make."

With fat legs far apart, Jimmy renewed his fury of digging; making the trash fly while Billy scooped up the loosened ashes and once more began patiently to shake the sifter.

"Gee, Jimmy! Here's something in the

sifter," whispered Billy excitedly. "But don't stop diggin', 'cause don't you remember Tom said that Fat Molly and Hippity Hop Pete would take anything away from us if we let on. Keep on a diggin' an' I'll talk easy."

"For the love of Mike, tell me what it is," begged Jimmy, trying to continue in the fury of digging, but finding it hard work.

"It's a bracelet an' it ain't any five and ten cent store one either. It's so dirty you can't tell much about it, but I'm pretty near sure it's gold. Anyhow let's make a get-away. We mustn't let on to Fat Molly an' Pete. We'll just walk by like we ain't had any luck but might come back sometime because of the mule shoe that we found. I reckon there was some good in that mule shoe, Jimmy."

"I reckon there was some, but I reckon

we got something because I was such a good digger."

"Maybe I was some sifter, too," suggested Billy.

"Well, you couldn't er sifted if I hadn't er dug — so that's that."

"Anyhow we mustn't fuss so's the others will know. Act real don't careish, Jimmy, and when we pass Fat Molly, for goodness sake don't give her any back talk."

The boys gathered up their implements and gunny sacks. Pretending great discouragement, they walked disconsolately past the big old colored woman and the little old white man.

"Ain't foun' nothin'?" asked Molly.

"Nothin' much," answered Billy. "A mule shoe an' a set of false teeth."

"A mule shoe!" cried Fat Molly excitedly. "Gimme! Gimme I tell yer! Nobody ain't lowed ter tote a mule shoe off'n

this here dump. Horseshoes an' mule shoes all b'long ter Hippity an' me. Don't they Hippity?"

"Yes, an' teeth too. I been wantin' a set of teeth fer come thirty years an' I ain't never foun' one."

With his best manner, Billy bowed to old Molly and handed her the mule shoe.

"You are welcome to it."

The old woman took it with a dazed expression on her funny little face.

"And Hippity Hop Pete, here are the teeth. I do hope they will fit. Better wash 'em first. I reckon they are full of germs."

Pete gave a gummy grin.

"I 'low a little dustin' will clean 'em up enough." After a hasty rubbing on his torn shirt sleeve, he slipped the set of false teeth in his mouth. "Jes' what I needed — uppers. I still got a few left down below. How do I look, Fat Molly?"

"Look like the las' trump when there shall be wailin' an' snatchin' of teeth," jeered Molly. "But you white boys ought ter gimme somethin' sides a mule shoe when you give all them teeth ter Hippity Hop Pete. This here mule shoe is mine by rights. You gotter gimme somethin' else."

"Gotter give you nothin'!" said Jimmy scornfully. "Ain't even gotter give you the mule shoe. Great mind to take it back. I found it myself, so Billy hadn't any right to give it away. Billy's all the time givin' away things I found. He had a right to give away the teeth, 'cause he dug 'em; but the mule shoe was mine."

Fat Molly turned purple with rage as Jimmy snatched the mule shoe from the pile of treasures she had unearthed that morning.

"Aw, Jimmy, please give it back to

her. I'll get you another mule shoe," begged Billy. "I'll buy you a new one."

"But you have gotter find it yourself, for luck. This one I found myself. Go get Fat Molly a new one if you're so rich. A new one'll do her just as well. Th' ain't any luck in the one you stole from me an' gave to her."

In the meantime Molly, enraged beyond measure, was endeavoring to scramble to her feet but her skirts became entangled in her rake and she could not get beyond a kneeling posture. She must content herself with invectives which she hurled at Jimmy, being for the moment unable to reach the piles of rusty iron and bones which might have served as ammunition.

The two boys were speechless with horror at the curses she called down on Jimmy. She cursed him coming and going, standing still and running, going to bed at night and

getting up in the morning, eating and drinking, sleeping and waking, naked and clothed. Boils would break out on him

and all his hair drop out. He would become blind and toothless, hungry and friendless. His mother and father would die and he would be sent to the poorhouse but would not be allowed to stay there

because of his general meanness. In spite of all the dire calamities that were to befall him, he was not to lose weight but was to grow fatter and fatter until finally he was to explode like a toy balloon.

All on account of a mule shoe! There flashed through Billy's mind a sing-song thing he had read or heard about a horseshoe nail — someone's carelessness in not putting it in at the right time:

"For the want of the nail the shoe was lost.
For the want of the shoe the horse was lost.
For the want of the horse the rider was lost.
For the want of the rider the battle was lost.
For the want of the battle the kingdom was lost.
All for the want of a horseshoe nail!"

This ran through his mind as Fat Molly ended her curse with:

"An' by'n'by you'll git so big an' fat, an' yo' skin will be so stretched tryin' ter retch aroun' you an' you'll be so weak an' trimbly tryin' to retch aroun' yo'self, an' yo' front'll eech an' you can't retch ter scratch, an' yo' back'll eech an' you can't retch ter scratch, an' you'll swole up bigger an' bigger 'till you'll bus' open—BANG!"

The bang came with such force and volume that Jimmy jumped, instinctively dropped the mooted mule shoe and ran from the scene of battle as fast as his fat legs would carry him.

"Keep your blame ol' mule shoe," he shouted when he reached the edge of the dump pile. "Keep it! 'Tain't nothin' but old iron. All the luck's gone out of it."

"Yi! Yi! Scairt a white boy!" shouted old Molly in reply. "Luck's still in it if I kin scare a white boy off'n my dump.

Mine! Mine! I tell yer it's my dump pile! All mine an' a little bit of it Hippity Hop Pete's. Git! An' dontcher dare come back."

"Who wants to come back? Not me'n Billy. We got all we want off of your ol' dump. Who cares anything about an ol' mule shoe? We got what we came for an' you can have the rest."

"Shh!" admonished Billy. "Didn't I tell you to keep quiet about that?"

"What does that other white boy say?" shrilled Fat Molly. "That other boy what ain't so bad for a white boy — what did he say, Hippity? Did he say they had found something else?"

"I believe he did," said Pete, who was taking great pleasure in grinning, now that he had something besides gums with which to grin. "I reckon those boys are smarter than you think, Fat Molly. I reckon they

went over yonder an' dag where they knew something was hid an' I reckon they done sifted out that two dollars an' fifteen cents. That's the reason they was a going off so peaceable like until you roused them. You are sho' a bombostious ol' nigger woman, Molly. That long legged boy was a nice boy an' I wish he'd come back here sometime an' dig some more. I kinder liked to see the sun a shinin' on his yaller head."

"An' you are nothin' but a fool peg-legged white man," was Fat Molly's scornful rejoinder. Hippity Hop Pete grinned with his new teeth.

CHAPTER VI

THE PARTNERSHIP BRACELET

TOM COLLINS was waiting within ear shot for the boys to return from their treasure digging expedition.

"Found anything?" he shouted as the pony stopped at his gate.

"Found a plenty, but Billy had ter give half of it away. Billy's the givin'est person I ever saw with other boys' things."

"Aw, forget it!" said Billy. "You surely don't begrudge poor old Hippity Hop Pete those dirty false teeth. And the mule shoe had already brought us all the luck we needed off a dump pile. Lookit, Tom! When we wash some of the dirt off I betcher this is gonter be a beut."

"Geewhillikins! It looks like gold!"

exclaimed Tom. "Come on down to the spring and let's wash it off. I betcher old Fat Molly didn't know you had found this or she'd have the law on you — the law of the Dump, I mean. She's made up a kind of law of her own that she must get a share in everything that gets dug up that's worth while. She's a funny ol' nig, but she ain't so bad after all an' I'm mighty glad when she decides every now an' then to come an' cook up some victuals for Pap an' me. She comes mighty little these days. It looks like diggin' in the dump pile has kinder got her crazy. She ain't never been to say reg'lar, but now she's got so she's regularly onregular."

The spring on Old Collins' place gurgled from the earth clear and limpid. If every spring has its own water sprite, what must the guardian fairy of Tom's spring have thought of the dire intentions harbored by

both Fat Molly and the Widow Leary in regard to turning the sweet, pure stream into a hog wallow? The grass on the banks was green and lush. Mint and cresses grew there. As the boys approached, a turtle slid from a rock where he had been sunning himself and with a pleasant kerchunk hit the water.

Three tiny water wheels were dotted along the little stream, gaily turning and splashing up the water as sturdily and busily as though real corn was being ground into real meal for real pygmies.

"Huh! I should think you'd be too big a boy to be playin' with water wheels," grunted Jimmy. "Even ol' Lina 'n Frances have stopped playin' dolls, an' you're older than they are, Tom."

Tom flushed.

"I wasn't zactly playin' with them wheels. I was jes' tryin' 'em out for Jose-

phine. I 'lowed as how she might like 'em. Not that I'd be above playin' with 'em if I hader mind. A game's a game, an' playin' with water wheels ain't any more sissyfied an' babyfied than hittin' a po' little white ball all over the country with fust one kind er club an' then another. That's what your paw spends a lot er time doin', Jimmy Garner."

"Aw, don't le's fuss," begged Billy. "Le's wash the bracelet an' see if it's gold. Gee! Ain't it caked with dirt? Looks like it's been in the dump since befo' the war."

The bracelet was put in the limpid stream and as the water engulfed it the ashes of the dump began to roll away. First the glint of gold showed as the water cleared and then the eager boys, peering into the ripples, spied a bit of pink in the ornament on the back of the piece of jewelry, and then more pink.

"Golly! It's coral!" cried Billy. "Gold and coral! I betcher we get more than any two dollars an' fifteen cents for this."

"There's no tellin' what we won't get," said Jimmy. "Ain't we all the time the luckies' guys, Billy? We're all time diggin'

up more treasures out of the dump. I reckon we're the very best scratchers that ever scratched. Let that ol' Fat Molly keep her mule shoe. It's a mighty good thing I told you not to mention the bracelet, Billy. She'd a had that too if she'd known about it."

As Billy had been the one who suggested secrecy where Fat Molly was concerned, it required some self control merely to smile and say nothing. After long intimacy with Jimmy Garner, Billy had learned that smiling and saying nothing was the easiest way to keep the peace, and Billy loved peace. He didn't mind a fight with fists, and freely indulged in the pastime when his boyish honor was involved, but a war of words held no attractions for him.

The bracelet was at last clean and Billy held it up for inspection. How it glistened

in the sun! It was an antique piece of jewelry; the kind Billy's grandmother or great-grandmother might have worn. It was composed of flat, massive plates, held together by cleverly concealed hinges, each plate engraved ornately. The gold was soft and pliable, evidently free from alloy. On the top of the bracelet was an ornament of intricate design and workmanship, consisting of an intermingling of pink coral and frosted gold, representing a bunch of grapes with leaves and tendrils. It was a wonderful example of the goldsmith's art.

"I reckon it must be worth most a million dollars," cried Jimmy. "Anyhow a thousand—or at least a hundred. I hope it ain't worth more'n a hundred because if it is, who in Tennesee is a gonter buy it from us?"

Billy was looking very solemn. Jimmy

pranced around, taking in the wonderful bracelet from all angles. His black eyes shone and his funny hair stood on end more like a scrubbing brush than ever. He was secretly training it to the prevailing style then worn by youths, and it was necessary for it to grow on top and be brushed back from the forehead. The more Jimmy brushed it back the more it stood on end.

"What's eatin' you, Billy? You look more like you done stirred up a hornet's nest than dug up a jew'l'd novelty," said Tom. "Thinkin' 'bout how mad ol' Fat Molly's gonter be when she hears 'bout yo' find?"

"No, I reckon Molly's not gonter hear about it, unless you tell her. I sho' ain't. What I'm worrying about is I think it's right for me'n Jimmy to advertise this bracelet. Somebody must a felt mighty bad about losing it."

Tom rolled on the grass with laughter.

"Advertise what's found on the dump pile! Gee, Billy, you beat the Saints and Martyrs for huntin' trouble. Ain't you gonter advertise the false teeth, too? I guess the man that lost those false teeth must a felt a heap worser than the dame that lost the bracelet. An' the po' mule limpin' along with only three shoes! Ain't you gonter advertise that, too?"

"Advertise nothin!" broke in Jimmy, his face red with suppressed rage. "Yes, an' advertise yo' grandmother! You can just speak for yourself, Billy Hill! I found half of that bracelet — at least I half found it, an' I tell you right now findin's keepin's on the dump an' I'm gonter keep my half. You can advertise your half all you've a mind to, but I'd like to know where our radio comes in if you are all the time advertising the things we find to

help pay for the parts Tom says we need. It takes money to advertise an' we ain't got any cash to spare."

"I reckon I'll talk to Maje about it," suggested Billy. "He will know what's right."

"Looks to me like you are a mighty big baby all the time to be botherin' the Major 'bout ol' bracelets," stormed Jimmy. "This ain't the Major's business. It's your business an' mine. You go an' talk to him an' then he'll come buttin' in an'—"

"You say that again, Jimmy Garner! Say it again!" The peaceful Billy doubled up his fists and edged close to Jimmy.

"Say what? Whatever it is I'll say it all I've a mind to. You're all time thinking you can keep me from sayin' things. You mean say you are a big baby? Well, you are if you go tellin' Major Estes everything you know."

"Big baby much! You know mighty well that ain't worryin' me. What I'm gonter lick you about if you don't take it back is your sayin' Maje will come buttin' in. Maje ain't ever butted in since he was born. You know he ain't, an' when you say he does you're a liar an' a villain an' a horse thief. You're a liar an' I dare you to take it back — fool if you do, fool if you don't — fool anyhow!"

Jimmy was far from cowardly and would have fought Goliath of Gath with as much courage as the youthful David, but fighting a big old giant who was an enemy of his tribe was a very different thing from standing up against an angry Billy who was defending his honor and the character of his beloved Major.

"Dare me to take it back, do you? Well I never take a dare from you, Billy Hill. I take it back: Major Estes don't never do

the buttin'. It's the goat that does it—your old Billy who butts an', what's more, butts the Major. If the Major had been as good at buttin' as the goat that time, it would have been the goat who would have had to eat his dinner off the mantel piece 'stead of the Major—who didn't find it convenient to sit down."

Jimmy's tone was soft and wheedling, and his expression so funny that Billy and Tom both burst out laughing.

"You know what's the matter with you two boys?" said Tom. "You done got a tech of sun out yonder on the dump an' you better both of you put yo' heads down in the spring for a while until you cool off."

Anger died down as hot heads were cooled off in the gurgling spring. It had been hot on the dump pile and no doubt both of the boys had been at fault. At any rate the fight was off, much to the re-

lief of both of them. Billy's honor was spared because the offender had retracted; and Jimmy's honor was safe because Billy had dared him to "take it back" and no one could ever say that he, Jimmy Garner, had ever taken a dare. Billy had never really dared Jimmy to take back his words concerning the Major as a butter-in. He had dared him to take up the quarrel in which he had been called a liar, a villain and a horse thief. But if Jimmy wished to interpret his words in such a manner, far be it from Billy to put him right in regard to the meaning of his double-dyed dare.

It was too hot to fight and it was also time to go home and clean up for the two o'clock dinner at the hotel. The boys were almost as dirty as the antique bracelet. Wetting their heads and faces in the spring had not cleansed them at all but merely lowered the water mark on their necks a bit,

Lazy, fat, old Brownie jogged along home with his load, Billy driving with slack reins and Jimmy dozing and nodding and waking with an occasional jerk.

"Who's gonter keep the bracelet, Billy?" he asked as the cart went over a stone and he was bumped into awakening consciousness.

"Either one. You keep it," answered Billy.

"Now how in the name of sense am I gonter keep it with all those women folks pokin' round my house?" spluttered Jimmy. "You ain't got a piece of petticoat at your house right now and there ain't anything couldn't go on where you live without folks findin' it out. My mamma's bad enough an' Sarah Jane is worse, but my ol' Great Aunt Pauline Pirtle is the beatin'est woman I ever saw for poking her nose in other folks' business.

She can't hear without her trumpet, but she can see a fly walkin' round on the moon. If I had that bracelet hid under the mattress of my bed ol' Aunt Pauline would find it. She'd see it through the tick. Looks to me like bein' deaf makes her see things. She comes snoopin' round the house, up-stairs an' down, her big black trumpet at her ear an' her eyes boring gimlet holes into bureau drawers an' into my father's pockets and clean into my stomic. I betcher my Great Aunt Pauline could tell how many kinds of pie you had et at the hotel by just lookin' at you. It sure is hard on my mamma to have had Great Aunt Pauline left to her in a will."

"I didn't know she had come to stay," said Billy after having accepted the position of custodian of the antique bracelet.

"Neither did we until last week. Mamma thought she was just on a pro-

tracted visitation until Cousin Peter Pirtle's will was read, and then it turns out that whoever takes care of Aunt Pauline will get the money he left Aunt Pauline. Aunt Pauline can stay wherever she wants to stay, but the folks she likes best, and is with when she dies, will get the dough. Of course it is up to mother and father to let the old lady stay with them and make her so happy she will want to go on staying as long as she lives. Gee Whillikins, Billy, I've gone and done it! It's a family secret and I let it out. I swore to my mother an' father up an' down I'd never tell an' here it popped out. You won't tell, will you?"

"Sure, and you know I won't."

"Not even to the Major?"

"Not even to the Major."

"I believe you, Billy. It is a kind of comfort to know how squeamish you are

about your honor. You can advertise your half of the bracelet all you want to, Billy, an' I won't kick. I think it is all foolishness, but your own honor is your own business. Anyhow it makes me sure you won't tell about Great Aunt Pauline and the dough."

CHAPTER VII

BILLY ADVERTISES

WHEN Major Estes read the paper he began with the weather notes at the top of the first page, carefully noted the name of the paper, the date, all the headlines and every word of every scrap of news of local, national, or world-wide interest. Editorials were read with judicial thought. Letters from interested subscribers were given their due place. The woman's page was poured over with a tolerant smile but with no less interest than the pink sheet given up to sports. Every advertisement, be it of lingerie or tombstones, was read and re-read. Real estate transfers and the time of the arrival and departure of trains were conned as though an exami-

nation was to be passed on the subjects. The obituary poems vied with the society column in interest. He might have been both male and female out of work from the attention he gave to "Help Wanted." That portion of the paper devoted to those hunting situations of all kinds was to him a human document. He never missed reading "Lost and Found." Not that he had ever lost or found anything, but it was in print, and the printed page, no matter what its subject, was of great import to the Major.

The Major was a neat masculine reader. He kept the paper smooth and straight, turning over each page with quiet precision, something few women ever do. Even his wife, with all of her overly neat and particular habits, usually managed to mix up the newspaper, hunting for some item of especial interest to women or yielding the

pink sheet to Billy and the Goop poem to Josephine.

Minerva had been gone only a little over a day. The Major missed her, and he missed his dear Josephine, but he was rather glad for the moment to have his newspaper to himself without the usual demands from the females of the family.

"Joseph, dear," was one common demand, "would you mind letting me have the part of the paper in which the notice of the church bazaar appears? I am sure you have read it once and I am very anxious to have the exact date so that I may make my plans accordingly."

And Josephine with her:

"Please read 'bout Walt an' Skeezicks, Daddy. I'm so worried 'bout whether Walt went to dinner with Mrs. Blossom. An', Daddy, please make me a soldier hat outer the pink piece."

And then Billy would hang around, wistfully waiting for the sheet with the daily cross-word puzzle.

Billy was hanging around now, but the Major felt it was not the cross-word puzzle that was holding the boy. Yesterday's puzzle had not been worked, so why should he worry about to-day's? It was evidently something else in the paper that was interesting Billy — that or something he wished to talk over with his old friend. Out of the corner of a twinkling eye the Major watched the overgrown, long-legged, fair-haired boy who might have been called angel-faced had it not been for something about Billy that was both human and manly.

The old man held his peace and continued his perusal of the news. He had reached the last page; saw that none of his friends or acquaintances had recently died;

noted that there was to be a sale of unclaimed freight. Then he began on "Lost and Found." Usually everything was lost and nothing found. Casually he scanned the list of liver spotted setters and beaded bags lost, strayed or stolen.

"Bless my soul, if something hasn't been found!" he exclaimed over an item at the bottom of the column, and then he began to chuckle and then to laugh as, through spectacles misty from tears of merriment, he read:

> "*Found — Half a anteek bracelet, gold and corral grapes. Reward and no questions answered if applied to William Green Hill. Tel.* 367."

"Billy, how do you spell antique?"

"A-n-t-e-e-k!"

"And how do you spell coral?"

"C-o-r-r-a-l!"

"Well, well! I have been thinking for some time that the modern method of schooling was no good. I was in hopes it would turn out to be a typographical error.

What good will cross-word puzzles do you, my boy, if you can't spell such words as coral and antique? But after all, the matter before the court just now is half of an antique gold and coral bracelet. Where

did you find it, son? And is it broken badly?"

"Digging in the dump pile, Maje, and it ain't broken at all. But half of it is Jimmy's, so I can't advertise but half of it. Of course the joke is on Jimmy, but he told me I couldn't advertise his part, only mine. Tom says it is foolishness to tell what you find in the dump pile, but somehow this bracelet was different from things most folks scratch up."

"I see. So you have been digging in the dump pile. A strange occupation for a little gentleman."

"I ain't — I'm not a little gentleman. An' I just dug in the dump pile because I was too proud to ask you for money that I reckon you'd a thought was for foolishness."

The Major's comfortable stomach began to quiver with amusement and then to

shake like the bowl full of jelly in the time honored poem about Santa Claus.

"Too proud to ask me for money so he dug in the dump pile! Well, Billy, some folks would be too proud to dig in the dump pile. How do you think your Aunt Minerva would look upon this method of raising money?"

"I put on my oldest clothes." Billy's tone was a bit sullen. "Besides, Aunt Minerva has said time an' again that all labor is honorable. An' gee, Maje, if we didn't labor to a fare you well! Digging an' sifting, sifting an' digging."

The boy recounted to his old friend the happenings of the morning, also their desire for a radio.

"An,' Maje, it was kinder fascinating. I c'n see how ol' Fat Molly's got so she don't wanter do a thing but dig in the dump. Tom Collins says she don't hardly ever

come an' cook up for him an' his mean ol' father any more. Tom's getting right skinny on no eatin's to speak of regular. I reckon if Fat Molly knew about this bracelet she'd tear out all her wrapped plaits by the roots. She's a fearsome ol' colored pusson, Maje. I betcher she an' ol' Hippity Hop Pete have been digging in the hole Jimmy an' me—"

"Jimmy and I, Billy," corrected the Major, who would stand for just so much bad grammar and no more. By careful and judicial hints he was gradually improving Billy's mode of speech.

"'Course, Jimmy an' I—Well, they're diggin' right now in the hole we dug, an' I betcher they've pretty near got to China by this time. You see, we found a mule shoe an' a set of false teeth there an' Molly an' Pete were looking at us mighty sly an' determined. It's kinder 'ginst dump eti-

quette to jump anybody's claim while they're digging, but I reckon the minute they stop it's all right."

The Major asked to see the treasure and Billy brought down the antique bracelet, carefully wrapped in tissue paper and placed in a scented soap box. The old man looked at the jewelry long and earnestly.

"Yes, Billy, it is beautiful. I've seen it before, but for the life of me I can't think where. Let me see! Let me see!"

Billy gently extracted the sheet of newspaper carrying the cross-word puzzle, while Major Estes turned the bracelet over and over, examining every detail of workmanship. Where had he seen it before? Coral grapes and frosted gold leaves! How wonderfully they were wrought! It was a fitting ornament for a beautiful arm.

The Major's memory flew back to beautiful arms he had known. His Minerva's

arm was rather pretty, now that she had taken on a becoming layer of flesh, but he could not remember ever seeing a bracelet on her arm. He smiled quizzically at the thought that in Minerva's youth — and indeed until within the last years, what might be called her ripe years — that lady had been given to wearing linen cuffs at the end of severely long sleeves. Now she often wore elbow sleeves and her arm was pleasantly rounded. Indeed, the coral and gold bracelet would look very well on his Minerva's arm. Perhaps if the owner of the bit of jewelry did not respond to Billy's advertisement he, the Major, would buy it from the boys for Mrs. Estes. Where had he seen it before?

"Maje, what is a word in six letters that means a faction in the United States."

"Rebels!"

"No, it haster end in a E."

"Yankee, of course!"

"Sure. Ain't I dumb, though? Course it's Yankee 'cause I haveter have the K for Kentucky. Thank you, Maje!"

"Yankee! By Jove, I'm glad you made me say that word. I know now where I saw that bracelet, at least the breastpin and ear rings to match. It was Miss Betsy, old Mr. Carroll's sister, who always said the Yankees stole the bracelet during the war. She still wears the pin and never misses a chance to tell where the bracelet is. I've had to look at the thing every time I have looked at Miss Carroll for lo! these many years. Call up old Carroll on the telephone, Billy."

"Not me, Maje! Ol' Mr. Carroll has had it in for me pretty near ever since me'n Wilkes Booth Lincoln was born. I reckon we uster worry him right smart when we were kids, running sticks along

the slats of his shutters an' a ringing his door bell an' hollering verses at him. Me'n Frances uster make up most of the verses. The best one we ever got we did together. It's a kinder limerick. Wanter hear it, Maje?"

"Very much!"

"There was an ol' gemman named Carroll,
Who went swimmin' an' lost his apparel;
He had such stumpy legs
He'd oughter used kegs,
But he hadter go home in a barrel."

The Major laughed.

"You don't see Frances and Lina much these days, do you?"

"No sir! They got too uppity all of a heap for me'n Jimmy. I mean Jimmy an' me. Jimmy says they toss their curls an' switch their skirts too much for him, but I must say I miss the — the — whatcher

might call intellectual companionship of Frances. Lina's nice enough an' real pretty, but Frances has got sense like — like a man. I kinder wanted to get Lina 'n Frances in on this scheme for raising some money, but Tom Collins wouldn't play if we got the girls in. Lina's been kinder turnedupnosed with him, but I betcher Frances hasn't. Frances coulder helped Tom a lot. She's got more sense about nailing an' measuring an' calculating. I can help some, but Jimmy's fingers are worse than thumbs. They're more like big toes."

The Major laughed again.

"But how about restoring the bracelet to its owner, Billy? Don't you think that Mr. Carroll would let by-gones be by-gones at this late day?"

"Not him, Maje!"

"Not he, Billy!"

"Sure, not he! I can't say that I blame the ol' codger much when I remember how Jimmy bloodied his nose an' saved it all up to sprinkle on Mr. Carroll's clean, white doorsteps. Gee, but he was hot in the collar! Maje, I sure do hope this bracelet doesn't belong to his sister. I betcher they won't wanter pay enough reward to buy a pig tail connector for our radio set."

"But, Billy, do you think it would be quite gentlemanly for you to ask any reward for finding something belonging to some one? I do not want to dictate to you, son, but I want you to consider the matter from all angles and always to remember that you are a young gentleman."

Billy thought a minute, a frown of concentration on his smooth young forehead.

"Now listen, Maje, I ain't a young gentleman, but if I had 'a been one an' had been a walking along the street an' had a

picked up a gold braclet some lady or other had a dropped, then I'd a felt it was up to me to give it back 'thout a piece of reward. But listen, Maje, I ain't nothing on God's green earth but a long legged no account boy who is trying to make enough dough to help pay for a radio. I went out to the dump pile to dig and scratch an' sift, an' I worked my fool self to death in the hot sun for hours an' hours with ol' Fat Molly a cussing an' swearing at me, an' Hippity Hop Pete looking like he'd take off his peg leg an' sling it at my head any minute, an' there Jimmy an' me — I mean Jimmy an' I — picked up a antique braclet so covered with ashes an' dirt you couldn't tell gold from brass. Now being as I ain't a young gentleman at all but just a plain boy, I think I oughter ask an' receive a reward."

The Major laughed again.

"I reckon you are right, Billy. 'The

laborer is worthy of his hire.' It is a nice point in etiquette you have brought up and you have spoken like an able lawyer addressing a jury. There's the telephone. Perhaps you had better answer it."

CHAPTER VIII

JIMMY DRIVES A BARGAIN

THE 'phone rang on and on for hours. It seemed as though every subscriber to the afternoon paper had at one time either lost a gold and coral bracelet or knew someone who had. Billy was kept busy answering the calls. The Major had cautioned him not to commit himself too far, and under no circumstances to hand the bracelet over to anyone until Miss Carroll saw it. No doubt she, too, would read the "Lost and Found" column and would see the advertisement.

Finally, at about dusk, Mr. and Miss Carroll came driving up to the Estes home in a great limousine, much the grandest turnout in the town. The Carrolls never

forgot that they were the Carrolls of Carrollton, nor did they permit anyone else to forget it. Whatever they had must not only be of the best but better than any ones else. For many years it had been their pleasure to own the whitest and cleanest door step in town. Now their fancy was to own the grandest and shiniest automobile. With many misgivings they had given up the victoria and pair of sleek bays that had been their means of locomotion from time immemorial. It had come to be most distasteful to the worthy pair to be forced to take the dust of any common fliver, and the only way to avoid it was to come down to the modern conveyance. In this they could dust instead of being dusted.

Mr. Carroll and his sister were as much alike as man and woman could be. If she had worn a frock coat and a top hat, and he had covered his round bald head with a

pansy bonnet and draped his shoulders with a black lace shawl, no one could have told which was which. They walked in the same manner — a toddle, a roll and a skip. Their mode of speech, however, differed decidedly. Mr. Carroll spoke in ejaculations, while his sister expressed similar sentiments in gasps.

"Is this where William Green Hill lives? Ha! What!" exclaimed Mr. Carroll as Major Estes arose from his seat on the porch to welcome the aristocratic couple.

"It is," smiled the Major. "And how are you, Miss Carroll — and you Mr. Carroll?"

"Well — but much upset," gasped the lady. "Why should anyone give a telephone number instead of an address? Everybody in town knows that brother and I abhor telephones. We had ours removed months ago because of the persistent de-

mands made on us. Actually, employees of the electric light company would call us at any moment of the night and ask us to see if the corner light was burning and to report to them. When I was obliging enough to do it, the wretched workman would actually laugh and say, 'Well, lady, be so kind as to blow it out then.' The person must have taken me for a fool. Everyone knows that electric lights cannot be blown out."

Billy was seized with a fit of coughing. Before Lina and Frances became so proud in regard to the two boys, one of the amusements of the Big Four had been to ring up various persons on the telephone and make absurd requests of them. The light on the corner was their favorite gag. The Carrolls had been their prize victims, not only because of their gullability but their irritability.

"What is the matter with that boy? Nothing contagious I hope. Eh! What!" from Mr. Carroll.

"Keep your distance," gasped the lady. "My system is in just the right condition for harboring disease germs."

"Nothing catching!" Billy managed to gurgle out. "I just swallowed the wrong way."

"Well don't do it again," commanded Mr. Carroll.

By that time brother and sister had managed to toddle, roll and skip up the steps, and at the Major's invitation they seated themselves uncomfortably on the front of the hospitable porch chairs.

"We come in regard to an advertisement we read in the afternoon newspaper," began Mr. Carroll.

"Exactly," continued his sister, "and a great time we had finding out who

William Green Hill was because we understand your ah — ah — stepson — "

"Nephew," corrected the Major. "But like a son," he added.

"Ah, nephew! What! Ha!" Mr. Carroll picked up the ball of conversation. "Your nephew's name was Billy."

"So it is," broke in Billy, "but I use William Green Hill in business, and this advertisement is business."

"Oh! Ah! What! And so you make a business of finding articles," stormed Mr. Carroll. "But I can tell you right now, young man, that this broken bracelet you are advertising is not my sister's, because she is sure that hers was stolen by the Yankees."

"I never said it was hers," spoke up Billy. "And besides, the bracelet is not broken."

"Not broken! Nonsense, young man!

Then why did you advertise it as broken?"

"I never. I said I had found half a bracelet — and so I have. Jimmy Garner and I were digging together and he found half and I found half."

"Well, it isn't mine, because mine was stolen by the Yankees when I was a mere child," simpered Miss Carroll.

"Yes indeed!" declared Mr. Carroll. "The Yankees took my sister's bracelet along with other heirlooms. No doubt some parvenu of the North is wearing the ornament now. Ah! Yes! No doubt you wonder why we took the trouble to come see your — ah — step — son. Ah — yes, excuse me — nephew — concerning this advertisement. We came merely to satisfy ourselves that the bracelet is not our family relic. Also we wish to inform you, young man," he growled, turning to Billy, "ah, yes, to inform you that this publicity is

exceedingly annoying to Miss Carroll and to me."

Billy giggled. "If it ain't yours, what's it to you?"

"It sounds enough like my bracelet to annoy me greatly," said Miss Carroll, loftily. "We Carrolls are not accustomed to have ourselves even remotely mentioned in print."

As Miss Betsy Carroll said "We Carrolls," she waved one hand toward her brother and with the other she gracefully pointed to her own heaving bosom. Billy's laughing eyes followed the dignified lady's gestures, first taking in the rotund brother and then the bosom palpitating under the fine lace shawl. There his eyes stopped as though glued to a spot where the shawl was fastened.

"Gee! Miss Carroll, it may not be your bracelet but it's the spittin' image of your

breastpin. Wait until I fetch it. Be back in a minute."

Billy took occasion while he was going into the house for the bracelet to pause at the window for a moment and whistle shrilly for Jimmy. Jimmy appeared at the opposite window in a twinkling.

"Hi, Jimmy, come on over! Looks like my ad has got in its work. Come quick!"

Jimmy slipped through the hole in the fence, a hole that had been enlarged from time to time to admit of the passage of his increasing portliness. Together the boys appeared on the porch, Billy carrying the soap box and Jimmy bringing up the rear. The moment Mr. Carroll spied Jimmy he began to ejaculate furiously. His "Oh's" and "Ah's" and "Well's" came like the spluttering of grease on a hot griddle.

"And so, here I see the bad, bad boy

who sprinkled blood on my white door steps!"

"Allow me to introduce my young friend and neighbor, Mr. James Lafayette Garner," the Major said, determined to keep the peace if possible. "Here, Billy, open up your box and let the lady and gentlemen see the bracelet you boys found."

Miss Betsy took the lovely thing in her hand and looked at it eagerly, although she was plainly endeavoring to be scornful of the boys' find. The truth of the matter was that Miss Carroll and her brother had so often told of the loss of the heirloom, and had taken such delight in their assertions concerning "thieving Yankees," that they were determined to stick to their yarn through thick and thin.

"Not mine!" she declared.

"Of course not!" from Mr. Carroll.

"It is very like your pin, Miss Carroll,"

said the Major. "I believe you have often said that the set was made to order for your grandmother and was the only one in existence and cost five hundred dollars."

"Pooh, pooh!" from Miss Betsy. "No doubt the horrid Yankee who stole it had it copied in a cheap imitation. The market may be flooded with them for all we know." She handed it to her brother.

"Exactly!" he ejaculated. "Of course, of course! Cheap imitation not worth two pins!"

"It may be a imitation," blustered Jimmy, "but it ain't cheap. It's gonter come high — at least my half is. I bid for the top half, Billy, the one with the ornaments. You can sell your bottom half as cheap as you've a mind to — give it away if you wanter, but the top half is gonter bring in some dough." Jimmy was determined to let old Carroll understand that

the blood that had been sprinkled on his doorstep had not been all of his fighting blood. There was plenty of it left, as Mr. Carroll would soon discover.

"Since it does not belong to Miss Carroll, you had better put it back in the box, Billy," said the Major. "I have no doubt you and Jimmy will have no difficulty in disposing of jewelry so beautiful and valuable. In fact, I may buy it from you myself — if Mrs. Estes likes it."

The Major knew full well that the bracelet was the one lost many years ago by the proud and haughty Carrolls. He also knew that the moment it was suggested that the heirloom might be bought by somebody not of the royal blood, both brother and sister would change their tune. He was right. No sooner had he spoken of buying it for his wife than the unreasonable pair began ejaculating and gasping:

"Ah! Oh! Let us examine the bauble more closely."

"Brother, perhaps we were too hasty in our judgment."

More careful examination disclosed they had been. An unmistakable E. C. was discovered underneath one of the massive linked plates. Similar initials were engraved on the back of the breastpin worn by Miss Carroll.

"Perhaps we had better decide it is mine after all," said Miss Betsy. "Give the little boys a dollar each, Brother, and we will just take the bracelet with us."

"Hold on!" shouted Jimmy. "You can give Billy a dollar for his half that he advertised, but my half is diffunt. My half is the one on top with the grapes an' things an' I ain't gonter sell mine so cheap. If the whole set cost five hundred dollars when it was new, I reckon it's worth a lot more

now. But I ain't no gouge an' I'm gonter part with my top half for forty-nine dollars. That'll make fifty for the firm," he whispered to Billy.

After much popping and puffing, spluttering and gasping, the wealthy Mr. and Miss Carroll agreed to the terms of the mercenary Jimmy. The Major stood by, with difficulty keeping hands off. The luck of the dump was the boys' and it certainly did not hurt the selfish old Carrolls to be made to pay for the recovery of their family heirloom. Mr. Carroll had such a large roll of greenbacks in his pocket that he was easily able to peel off the ten five dollar notes without appreciably decreasing the bulk of his ready money. The the two toddled, rolled and skipped down the steps and out to their waiting limousine. On the whole, they were cheerful. Fifty dollars was little enough to pay for the long-

lost antique. As for the oft repeated charge against the "thieving Yankees," they were sure that the wretches had stolen it and thrown it away on the dump heap just for meanness. The fact that the dump heap was not there at that time in no way changed the probabilities.

Jimmy magnanimously d i v i d e d the money, not holding to the bond of forty-nine to one.

"But I must say, Billy, that I'm the tradin'est fellow in town. It sure was a good thing I thought of having you advertise that half a bracelet was found. That's what made the old Carrolls come across. They thought it was gonter be broke in two an' when they found out it was whole they didn't mind near so much handing over the fifty bucks."

CHAPTER IX

THE PURLOINED EAR TRUMPET

TALK was all of rheostats, switch levers, vario-couplers, aerial insulators, detectors, amplifying transformers and so on. Ohms and volts and points and plugs were spoken of as freely as though the boys had been installing radio sets all their lives. Billy liked best the funny names like "flat pancake inductance coils," "cat's whisker pig tail connectors" and "peewee clips."

"I think Pilot Two Circuit Jack sounds like a burglar in the movies," he said as he poured over the latest catalogue of radio materials.

In spite of the tidy sum the diggers in the dump pile had realized as a reward for

returning the antique bracelet, they had determined to keep their expenses within the ten dollars and eighty cents — Tom's original estimate for the cost of their radio equipment. This was in respect to the advice given by Major Estes and Mr. Garner. They had persuaded the boys that it would be much more interesting and wonderful to make a success of the inexpensive machine than to spend all their money on something that might not work at all.

The parts were at last all ready to assemble. The woodhouse attic was the workshop and the place chosen for installing the radio. Mr. Griggs had but recently begun to handle the equipment for amateur radio bugs and knew nothing about the stock. He bought according to catalogue and sold according to what supplies he had on hand. Jimmy and Billy were

even more ignorant than Mr. Griggs, but Tom Collins had mastered the workings of the machine and knew to an inch how much single green silk wire must be bought and how much double green silk, how much cotton covered and how much square bus-bar wire. Tom knew just where to economize in brackets and knobs, and knew what could be done without and what was absolutely necessary.

"We'll jes' have year phones an' not a loud speaker," he suggested. "Them loud speakers costs money."

"Billy'n me's made of money right now," boasted Jimmy, "but we've put it in the savings bank, all but five apiece. You gotta leave it in a month before you can get any income from it. I got my father to keep care of my bank book an' Billy got the Major to keep care of his. You can't get out a cent without your book. I reckon

if it's cheaper we'd best get the kind you say. Will they last a year."

"Gwan!" laughed Tom. "I ain't talkin' 'bout this year or las' year but the kinder years you an' donkeys wag."

"Well how'm I to know if you don't pronounce right? Everybody knows the Y in ears is silent. Teacher 'splained all that to us way back in primary. As for loud speakers, Aunt Priscilla Pirtle is turning our whole family into those. If you want any loud speaking I reckon I'm your man. I tell you sometimes I think my mother wishes Aunt Priscilla had never been wished on her. She's the funniest ol' dame you ever saw. She's all time stealing ice water to wash her feet in an' she leaves her trumpets all over the house."

"Trumpets?"

"Yes, ear trumpets. She's got three or four — all sizes — according to how much

she wants to hear. She's got a teensy one for church an' a whopper for fair for listenin' in on my mamma's comp'ny."

The above conversation was held up in the woodhouse attic on the morning of the evening when the great test was to be made as to whether it were possible for Tom Collins to make a radio that would work. The boys had been busy for days and days. Jimmy and Billy furnished money and willing feet, while Tom furnished brains and skilled hands.

"Now all we need is a aerial," said Tom as he set the last mysterious screw. "Ain't ary one er you got a ol' bed springs? That wouldn't cost you nothin' an' they do say bed springs makes the best aerial yet."

"Sarah Jane's got one she's tryin' to air the chinches outer," said Jimmy. "It's been leaning up against the back of her

house for weeks an' weeks. I reckon she wouldn't miss it, an' if she does I can make out the chinches carried it up onto this roof. Sarah Jane ain't got any more sense than to believe me."

Sarah Jane being busy in Mrs. Garner's kitchen, it was an easy matter to borrow the bed springs, and a willow oak mercifully hid the woodhouse roof from the eyes of the inquisitive. Since Billy had borrowed the two electric batteries that were connected with his Aunt Minerva's front door bell, it was now Jimmy's turn to furnish something. While Miss Minerva was off on a visit, and Aunt Cindy was down at the plantation, a front door bell was of no use anyhow, so Billy decided to borrow the batteries for the time being. They would buy some later when they found out for sure just how strong a battery would be necessary to bring in messages from the

Pacific Coast. Jimmy argued that the chinches would be much more thoroughly aired up on the roof than down on the ground and that in reality he was doing Sarah Jane a great service by borrowing her springs.

"Look here, Tom, with those head phones you got, can't but one person listen to oncet, can they?" asked Jimmy.

"That's all," answered Tom. "We'll jes' haveter take turn about."

"Gee, that'll be slow," declared Billy. "Le's bust loose, Jimmy, an' buy us a loud speaker. I can see you letting me have a turn when they read the market reports. What do loud speakers cost, Tom?"

"You can get 'em for ten cents but they ain't no 'count. Mr. Griggs don't carry nothin' but them cheap screw ones. It's best to order by catterlogue for them loud speakings."

"Well then, le's order by catalogue," agreed Billy.

"That'll take weeks, anyhow days," said Jimmy. "I wish't we had a thought about it sooner. I been saying all the time that those ol' ear muffs wouldn't do a thing but keep out cold."

"Say, Jim," put in Tom, "what's the matter with borrowin' your aunty's ear trumpet? The big one would fit in fine an' I could screw it onto one er these here head receivers an' all of us could hear to oncet. You could let her keep her go-to-meetin' one. That oughter be a plenty for one ol' lady."

"Golly! I'll do it. She'll just think it is lost an' I'll take it back as soon as our own catterlogue one comes."

Jimmy went off as fast as his fat legs would carry him and was back in an incredibly short time with poor great-aunt

Priscilla Pirtle's trumpet, the one she kept for listening in on Mrs. Garner's private conversations.

"I reckon my mamma'll be glad," panted Jimmy. "I came mighty near getting caught. Hadter hide under the bed while Aunt Priscilla opened and shut drawers an' looked in her wardrobe 'bout 'steen times. She came upstairs the minute I got in her room. She's the beatin'est person I ever saw for going where she ain't wanted. Anyhow, here's her trumpet. It certainly is a good thing I told you about it. I tell you I'm a wide-awake 'un."

Everything was in readiness. It was dusk when the boys met in the woodhouse attic for the great tryout. Tom had worked all day, stopping only to snatch a hasty lunch brought to him by Jimmy and a not quite so hasty supper furnished by Billy. Tom's father never knew or cared where his

son was, and because of this it was not necessary for the boy to report at home. When he was hungry and had no other place to go, he went home to eat. When he was sleepy he usually came home to sleep, but sometimes decided to "hit the hay" in somebody's barn or in good weather to stay all night in the woods.

The last screw was in place, the aerial connected in the approved manner, the batteries installed and Aunt Priscilla Pirtle's best and biggest ear trumpet adjusted for the loud speaker.

"Now for the tryout!" exclaimed Tom. He began gently and cautiously to turn the knobs. The boys listened breathlessly as the dials moved. There was no sound save Jimmy's heavy breathing.

"Don't puff so, Fatty," said Tom. "I can't hear my years for your snortin' an' blowin'. I pretty near got static then but

you were makin' sech a fuss I lost it."

"Got nothin'! You all time thinking it's my fault the ol' machine's no 'count," said Jimmy, trying nevertheless to hold in instead of puffing out. "I betcher I can make it work. Let me try."

"In a minute," promised Tom. "I gotta screw this jim-crack up a leetle bit tighter. Hand me that there screwdriver, Billy."

A twist of the wrist, a slight manipulation of some mysterious wires in the back, and again Tom slowly turned the dials. A terrific screeching and squeaking suddenly filled the attic and so startled the boys that Billy and Jimmy jumped back from the radio. But Tom manfully held on to the knobs, slowly turning them. The great noise stopped as suddenly as it had begun and the boys jumped again when a loud but pleasant man's voice, which seemed to be right in the woodhouse attic, casually

remarked: "Little Black Sambo, I'm going to eat you up!"

"It's working! It's working!" cried

Tom. "Gee, boys, I'm pretty near tickled stiff!" and Tom rolled on the floor in an ecstacy of delight.

"'Course it's working," said Jimmy. "Didn't I tell you it was gonter work?"

"Shh! Listen," pleaded Billy.

"—And Little Black Sambo said, 'Oh, Mr. Tiger, please don't eat me up and I'll give you my purple shoes with the crimson soles and crimson linings.' But the tiger said, 'What good would your shoes be to me? I have four feet and you have only two shoes.' 'You might wear them on your ears,' said Little Black Sambo."

Billy was entranced. It made him think of his own little playmate, Wilkes Booth Lincoln.

"Bedtime stories!" announced Tom.

"That's 'cause we got those ol' springs of Sarah Jane's up there for a aerial," said Jimmy. "We mighter known that woulder happened."

"Don't interrupt this gentleman, Jimmy. Listen to what Little Black Sambo did."

Suddenly, without warning, the bedtime story turned into a wailing screech.

"Tiger got him that time," jeered Jimmy. "Got him an' darned if I ain't glad of it. Tune up for something a bit more cheerful, Tom."

But the machine had suddenly gone dead. Try as he might, Tom could not get another sound. Dials were turned this way and that. Knobs and screws were tightened, mysterious wires that might have become crossed were carefully looked into, but still no sound came to fill the boys' hearts with elation.

"Something's happened, but I'm blest if I know what," said Tom. "Anyhow it's worked once an' it'll work again. I'm plum wo' out an' I gotta have some sleep. I reckon I'll go see what my ol' man is up to an' git a night's rest. I hope he ain't drunk, but if he is I hope he's dead drunk an' not jest onery an' grouchy."

"Why dont you sleep here in the wood-

house attic," suggested Billy. "Wilkes Booth Lincoln all time useter sleep here before Aunt Cindy got Maje to build on the lean-to to her house. His cot is still up here."

"Not on your life!" declared Tom. "I don't sleep after no black boy. I don't care who he is. I know Wilkes Booth Lincoln is a darn sight cleaner than what I am, but I won't sleep after him all the samey. I may look pretty nigh as black as he does but what's on me kin be scrubbed off, but what's on him can't. No, I'll lope on home an' be back in the mornin'."

Billy could but respect Tom's color line, although personally he would have much preferred sleeping after his friend Wilkes Booth Lincoln than Tom Collins. The colored boy bathed regularly and thoroughly. Aunt Cindy had seen to that from the start. His clothes were quite as clean

as Billy's own and his habits as tidy as any white person living.

"You an' Jimmy can keep on a tryin' to git something if you've a mind, but when you git through turn it off. See, thisaway! Th'ain't no use in usin' up the batteries — even if they ain't yours."

After Tom departed for his much needed sleep, the two boys vainly endeavored to catch some sound from the tricky air. But no matter what combination they tried, turning the dials clock-wise and anti-clock-wise, all was silent.

"'Tain't no use," grumbled Jimmy. "We've just wasted our money. Tom Collins is all time mighty careless of other folkses' ten dollars an' eighty cents."

"Aw, cheese it, Jimmy. 'Tain't any more Tom's fault than it is ours. It worked once an' it will work again. Let's leave it rest a while. I'm tuckered out anyhow an'

I'm gonter go to bed. We'll try it again to-morrow."

With a final twist of the dials, Billy gave up and the boys went slowly and sadly to bed and to sleep. Jimmy's beauty sleep was somewhat disturbed by the consciousness that Aunt Priscilla Pirtle had missed her ear trumpet and poor Mrs. Garner was searching high and low for it. Once she came into her son's room, opened the drawers and looked under the bed. He heard her shouting to Aunt Priscilla that she was sure they would find it in the morning, and the old lady was finally persuaded to go to bed. Jimmy snuggled down in his pillow with the comforting thought: "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." He determined to sneak the lost trumpet back into Aunt Priscilla Pirtle's room the very first thing in the morning. In the meantime — sleep, blessed sleep!

Billy was too tired even to tell his beloved Major of the success and failure of the radio. He crawled into bed like one in a trance and was off to dreamland in a second. For the one conscious moment before sleep claimed him, it flashed through his mind that he had forgotten to disconnect the batteries as Tom had instructed him, but before he could decide what to do about it he was dead to the world.

CHAPTER X

THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER

AUNT CINDY cut her visit to the plantation rather short. She had planned to stay through "Big Meetin'" and until some of the crop of converts were baptized, but she confided in Aunt Blue-Gum Tempy:

"The white folks air a missin' of me an' I reckon I'll put my foot in the pike an' make tracks fur home."

Aunt Cindy was quite right. The white folks were missing her, but that was not her real reason for returning. The truth of the matter was that the old woman was in a quandary as to the behavior of Peruny Pearline in regard to her son, Wilkes Booth Lincoln. Many and violent had been the

conversations between Peruny and Aunt Cindy, and in every conflict Aunt Cindy had been worsted by the calm and impertinent stand of the younger woman, who utterly refused to allow her son to return to the home of Major Estes unless said Major was willing also to undertake the care of Decimus Ultimus.

"I ain't a keerin' what legal rights that there Major air got," Peruny Perline declared. "I got nachul mother's rights, an' mother's rights come befo' any legal rights. Yo' white folks done got the pick er my chilluns an' it ain't but right that they should do sumpen fur others er mine. Deci done sot her heart on goin' up ter town ter be hand maid an' companium ter that there little Josephime, an' when Deci sets her heart an' mind on sumpen th' ain't no use in tryin' ter turn her about, she air that hard haided. Fust thing in the morn-

in' an' the las' thing at night she say the same thing. She been a keepin' it up ever since that time I took all the chilluns up ter town ter see the champinzee an' the rhimonoscerious an' did such a sight of tradin' at Billy's an' them rubbish sales. Deci air that 'termined that I done decided th' ain't nothin' ter do with the chil' but give her the reins."

"The reins much!" scornfully exclaimed Aunt Cindy. "You much better git a peach tree switch after her."

"Switch! I done mos' lammed the life outer that there gal an' lammin' don't do mo' than jes' start her goin' agin. Stid er sayin' she gonter go live with Josephime onct she keep on a sayin' it like a katydid or a tree frog. She even say it in her sleep. The onlies' way she change her chune is when she say: 'Why can't I go live with Josephime? Why can't I go

live with Josephime?' Why, Aunt Cindy, sometimes I gits so wo' out with that chil' I gits scairt I'm gonter kill her. One time I did tap her with a bed slat but it didn't have no mo' effeck on her than a snowflake in a hog wallow. She jes' caught her breath an' it looks like it gave her second wind 'cause she chuned up louder than ever an' mo' stiddy like wid her 'I'm gonter go, I'm gonter go, I'm gonter go when Wilkes Booth Lincoln goes.'"

"Well, she ain't—an' that's flat!" said Aunt Cindy. "I can't see whe'fo' you expect Miss Minerva an' the Major ter take an' keep keer of a hard haided gal like that. You done say yo'self that she air so bad you're 'fraid you mought kill her. We don't want no bad chilluns a playin' with our Josephime."

"Bad! Why, my Deci ain't bad. She's the pick er my chilluns, barrin' Wilkes

Booth Lincoln. She ain't never been a mite er trouble until she got this notion in her haid. You kin ask my mammy."

Aunt Blue Gum Tempy was loud in her praise of Deci's disposition.

"She's always been a easy baby, not even contagious. An' if she did cotch any disease she cotch it light. When the other chilluns were down with scarlet fever, Deci didn't git no mo'n nettle rash. An' when Admiral Farragut Moses on down ter Mira Bell Dicktu had smallpox, that there Deci didn't have a thing mo'n chicken pox. She sho' air a good healthy gal an' helpful like, too.

"This here notion er hern ter go live with Wilkes Booth Lincoln's white folks don't mean she's bad any mo'n a Christian's settin' his heart on goin' ter Heaven is bad. It's jes' retchin' up fer the highes' an' holies'. Deci ain't never heard anything

since she could set up in a cheer an' play with a feather an' 'lasses cept'n how good the Major is an' how Christian-lak Miss Minerva is an' how fine Billy is an' how cute little Josephime is. When Deci sets up in bed an' declares an' vows she's a go-in' to live with Josephime, 'tain't any mo'n a poor sinner shoutin' 'I want ter be a Christian in my heart' or 'I want ter go to Heaven when I die jes' ter hear ol' Jourdan roll.' Sis Cindy, why don't you take the gal up ter town with you on a visit like? All you got ter do is send her back if the white folks say so."

"Yes, send her back an' send Wilkes Booth Lincoln along with her," said Peruny Pearline, stolidly.

Aunt Cindy, in her heart, had always been a little afraid of Peruny Pearline. It was perhaps the Indian blood in the younger woman that gave a certain fierce

look to her at times; a look like a wild animal that had been caught and partially domesticated but was liable at any monent to revert to the original untamed state of ferocity.

"If she looked like a Injun squab I wouldn't be so squeamy about her," Aunt Cindy had confessed to one of the church sisters. "But Peruny Pearline don't look like no ooman. She stands so high an' looks so like she gonter scalp yo' hair off'n yo' haid that she always seems ter me kinder like a Injun thief, I mean the man what is the boss of all of them. Now Sis Blue-Gum Tempy ain't a bit that-a-way. I reckon raisin' all of Peruny Pearline's chilluns air done took outer Sis Tempy what spunk she mought a started with."

Nevertheless it was Aunt Tempy's gentle argument that finally persuaded Aunt Cindy to take Decimus Ultimus back to

town with her on a visit. The old woman decided it would be wise to reach home a few days before the mistress. The Major would be much easier to convince than Miss Minerva, also more convincing once he was convinced. Josephine had never ceased to clamor for Deci to be brought to town and kept as a playmate for her. Indeed, Aunt Cindy was sure that the little white girl had been quite as persistent as the little colored one. She was sure that a day had never passed that Josephine had not begged her mother to relent and send for Dcimus Ultimus. She even prayed that the hard heart would soften in regard to Deci. Miss Minerva, however, had remained adamant.

"I gave in in permitting Wilkes Booth Lincoln to remain, but I shall never allow myself to be so weak again. To be sure Wilkes Booth Lincoln, owing to Christian

guidance and influence, has turned out to be a very likely and handy boy, but I might not have such good luck with this Deci."

"I reckon you wouldn't," giggled Josephine, "'cause Deci ain't no boy to start with."

Aunt Cindy was getting old and she could not face the prospect of a winter without Wilkes Booth Lincoln to assist her in the many ways to which he had been so carefully trained by her. She found fault with him constantly, but at the same time realized that the boy was invaluable. He was strong, willing and intelligent, and was so accustomed to the old cook's grumblings that he rather missed it when she forgot to be severe with him.

"Kinder like eatin's 'thout no salt an' pepper in 'em," the boy had said once when Aunt Cindy forgot and asked him "please"

to do something and then said "thank you" when he did it.

Wilkes Booth Lincoln was eager to get back to town and his beloved Billy. The weeks he had been forced to spend on the plantation had been far from pleasant, in spite of the sudden affection that his mother was evincing for him. The boy was sure it was all put on for some sly purpose. She had never shown him any affection before and had not made a murmur when he went to town to live with his white folks; in fact, she had seemed rather glad to be rid of him. He had often heard her openly declare that she would not mind having so many children if they had been born without mouths.

Now Wilkes Booth Lincoln knew perfectly well that Admiral Farragut Moses the Prophet Esquire, Mose for short, was his mother's favorite; in fact the only

one of her children for whom she had the slightest affection, looking upon all of the others as necessary evils. Now when she insisted that he, Wilkes Booth Lincoln, was the pick of the bunch, it made the boy vaguely uneasy; as though he had been singled out from a litter of pigs as the one whose plumpness made him the likeliest one for the next killing.

Another thing Wilkes Booth Lincoln hated about living on the plantation was that he was forced to sleep four in the bed, three lengthwise and one crosswise. He occupied the doubtful vantage ground between the twins, Postle Peter and Pistle Paul, while Mirabile Dictu curled up crosswise, giving poor Wilkes Booth Lincoln no place to put his feet unless he forced them under his little brother or placed them on top of him. He often thought of his nice clean cot in the woodhouse attic,

even looked forward with pleasure to occupying the lean-to that Aunt Cindy had persuaded the Major to build for him off her house.

The boy had secretly determined that,

should his mother refuse to allow him to return to the home of his adoption, he would wait until the dark of the moon and run away from home. He had done it before, when he was nothing but an ignorant little boy, and now that he was big

and strong and educated he would do it again. If the Major could not keep him he would go far off where Peruny Pearline could not find him.

"We'll jes' ketch the afternoon bus," Aunt Cindy said to Wilkes Booth Lincoln when she finally decided to take Deci on a trial visit to Miss Minerva's. "That'll put us there after dark but that don't make no mind to me. We kin git to bed an' have a good res' up an' be ready for a hard day's wuck pickin' up after Billy an' the Major. Two he folks lef' alone all this time air sho' to er drapped a passel er mess. I know Sam Lamb was gonter clean up whilst me'n Miss Minerva wa' gone, but Sam Lamb ain't nothin' but jes' anudder he."

It was a happy trio that climbed into the rear seat of the interurban motor bus which skirted the plantation in its route.

Aunt Cindy was glad to be going back to the beloved little house built for her in the Estes's back yard. She was also glad to be leaving her old husband, Uncle Jimber-jawed Jupiter, who grew to be more and more of a nuisance as time went on. He had never been very satisfactory as a husband and provider, even in his younger days; and now that he was old, and had some excuse for not being very energetic, he had determined to make Aunt Cindy support not only herself but him as well. She grumblingly gave him a portion of every week's wages, but she much preferred supporting him from a distance.

"He kin take the lane an' I'll take the pike. I gotter keep a goin' but I ain't a gonter trabel along side er that ol' baboon any longer. It's enough fer me ter haveter keep him in bacon an' baccy 'thout his all time comin' whinin' roun' me ter give him

a nickel ter buy pep'mint stick candy with. I thought when that ol' nigger los' his las' tooth that it mus' be his sweet tooth what he been all time talkin' 'bout. Mebbe so, but I foun' out he got a mouth full er sweet gums. I ain't never seen a baby want candy so bad as that ol' Jupiter."

This remark was addressed to Wilkes Booth Lincoln after they had waved good-bye to friends and relations and had started on the journey to town. Uncle Jupiter was one of the chief mourners over the departure of the three. Tears were streaming down his furrowed old face as he took a huge red cotton bandanna from his pocket and waved it at the disappearing bus.

"Look at him cryin'!" exclaimed Aunt Cindy scornfully. "It don't mean nothin' mo'n a ice pitcher sweatin' in hot weather, them tears er Jupiter's. He got a onion in his coat tail pocket this minute an' he's

been a rubbin' his eyes with it. I smelt it as plain as day. You kin fool me on some things, but onion smell ain't one er them."

Wilkes Booth Lincoln was even happier than Aunt Cindy that he was leaving the plantation behind him. No more sleeping four in a bed, no more bear hugs from a mother who had never lavished embraces on him as an infant, and whose caresses, now that he was a great boy, only served to embarrass him.

If Aunt Cindy was happy, and Wilkes Booth Lincoln happier, then Deci was surely happiest. She had labored long and hard to accomplish this going up to live with the white folks and, as Aunt Tempy had put it, it was like going to Heaven. In a rough dry pink gingham dress, with her plaits decorated with huge bows of pink crepe paper — so huge that her hat must be carried in her lap — the child sat

between Aunt Cindy and her brother, her eyes shining with excitement and an expression of absolute beatitude on her little brown face.

"I'm a gonter go live with Josephime!" she chanted. "I'm a gonter go! I'm a gonter go live with Josephime! I'm a gonter go! Yes, my Lawd, I'm a gonter go!" and then she said it all over again.

Aunt Cindy was on the verge of remonstrating with the child but when she came out with: "Yes, my Lawd," the old woman decided that perhaps Deci was "seekin'" and there was nothing to do but let her sing herself to sleep, which she did before the bus had rattled many more miles. With her head on Aunt Cindy's fat lap, and her feet on her brother's knees, she fell asleep in the midst of a "gonter go."

As the interurban bus rumbled eastward from the river plantation, carrying Aunt

Cindy, Wilkes Booth Lincoln and Decimus Ultimus, Mrs. Joseph Estes and her little daughter Josephine, in a late model touring car, sped southward from Louisville. Miss Minerva was also cutting her visit short. In her last letter to her husband she had announced that she would be away from home a week longer, but a sudden fit of homesickness had seized her and when an opportunity offered to take the trip by motor with an old friend and neighbor, she seized it and decided to surprise the Major and Billy. It necessitated a very early start and meant that they would not arrive at their destination until some time in the night, but anything to get back home. Visiting was pleasant enough for a few days but there was no place like home to Miss Minerva.

"It'll be mighty nice to see my Daddy an' Billy," said Josephine. "I wish Aunt

Cindy an' Nick'd be home too. They'll tell me all abount my Deci." The child was leaning against her mother's arm as the car whizzed along the smooth Kentucky road that wound between rolling pastures of blue grass. Josephine could feel her mother stiffen a little as she spoke of Deci.

"You must pray awful hard, Minerva." Josephine still called her mother Minerva, and that lady had long ago given up trying to force the child to address her in a more respectful manner. The child argued that the Major loved her and respected her and he called her Minerva, and if he did why shouldn't she, since she loved her just as much as did the Major.

"I say you must pray awful hard, Minerva — harder than me — 'cause if you didn't God would just haveter answer my prayers. Of course I reckon he haster tend

to grown folks first, or it wouldn't be politeful. Every time I pray for Deci to come live with me, you go an' tell God not to do it. I been a prayin' all the time we were away from home an' I'm kinder thinkin' I got ahead of you, dear Minerva. I'm afraid I've been kinder sneaky to keep it up all the time, 'cause I'm pretty near sure you been forgettin' while we were a visitin'. I got to kinder feelin' that 'cause I've been prayin' so hard an' so long while you was lettin' up some that maybe my prayers are a gonter be answered."

The child nodded as she talked and her words trailed off into silence. The mother looked down on her sweet fluffy head. What a precious thing she was! Why should she want that little darkey so much? Mrs. Estes thoughts strayed back to her own childhood. Like all southern children, she too had played with the little colored

children. Her especial companion was a little girl named — what was her name?

"Bumps!" Miss Minerva answered herself aloud. Josephine stirred and opened her eyes.

"I reckon it was the bump that woken me. Guess what I been dreamin', Minerva. I dreamed that Deci was at home a waitin' for us. She tol' me that she'd been a prayin' an' I been a prayin' an' the two prayin's together done beat your one prayin' an' God done let her come to town to live with us. I betcher my dream is true an' she's waitin' for us this minute or maybe she an' Aunt Cindy an' Nicky are on their way just like we are."

"Humph!" was all Miss Minerva said, but Josephine snuggled up close to her and said:

"If a little colored girl hader come all the way up from the plantation to see me

an' you found her at home you wouldn't send her packin' back to her ol' Injun mother, would you, Minerva?"

Josephine noticed that her mother's arm did not stiffen as it had when she first broached the oft discussed subject of Decimus Ultimus. She merely put her arm around her little daughter and drew her closer.

CHAPTER XI

FRANCES WEAKENS

WHILE Miss Minerva and Josephine were speeding south from Louisville, Aunt Cindy, Wilkes Booth Lincoln and Decimus Ultimus were rumbling eastward. At the same hour Billy and Jimmy and Tom were listening to the exciting adventures of Little Black Sambo, broadcast from WEAF, and Lina Hamilton and Frances Black were walking up and down the sidewalk, arms intertwined and heads close together.

"I said to him and he said to me—"

"Don't you tell a soul—but—"

"I wouldn't have minded a mite—if—"

"Mine is gonter be pink, pink with

white lace and the cutest little row of buttons. I love rows of buttons. They are so —so—*de trop*." This last was from Lina. Frances giggled.

"You're right, Lina. They're certainly *de trop*—that is, for me. Why don't you leave off the French until you know what it means. The truth of the matter is, Lina, you need Jimmy Garner to take you down a peg every now and then. Of course Jimmy is mighty smarty, but it is good for you to get jacked up now and then, and Jimmy is the one to do it."

Lina removed her arm from Frances's waist and drew her pretty figure up to as great a height as it would permit.

"Excuse me, Miss Black, but I think you have overstepped your bonds."

"Aw, gee, Lina! Don't get huffy. I didn't mean to make you sore—besides, you mean bounds and not bonds. I've

been polite to you for so many days now that I felt like I had to cut loose like old times. Golly, I wish we hadn't gone and outgrown Billy and Jimmy. I miss the good times like all forty. Those boys have been having a peach of a time lately. They're making something over in the woodhouse attic. I can't imagine what it is, but I'm gonter find out."

"I fahncy it's just some boyish passthetime," said Lina, loftily. Lina was endeavoring to use the broad A and sometimes she was inclined to overdo it and at others to forget it altogether. She remembered it in fancy and forgot it in pass. "For my part, I have no vulgar curiosity concerning those children."

"Aw, come off your high-horse, Lina. You can pretend they are kids to them, but you can't to me. Billy can beat us both all hollow in Latin and English,

and even Jimmy is better in 'math' than you are. I'm bored at being so grown-up and the first time I get a chance I'm gonter apologize to the boys and get back in the gang."

"Are you going to 'sociate with Tom Collins, too? Because if you are, I'm afraid my mother will not let me be your best friend any more."

"Well of all the foolishness!" exclaimed Frances hotly. "Mothers don't keep you from being best friends. You either are or you aren't. Mothers can keep you from going with your best friend, that is if they support you, but as soon as you get to making your own living it's none of their business, I mean mothers. I'm gonter make my living and do as I please."

"Well I'm not! My mother and my father don't want me to do anything but just be a belle — and I'm gonter be one!"

"Not on your life! That is, not unless you stop being so hoity-toity. If you expect to be a belle for long you'd better be polite to all the boys. They'll get to be long panters before you know it and they'd come in right handy at pulling you loose from the wall when you get stuck there. As for Tom Collins, I reckon he's as good as some of these gum-chewing cake-eaters that hang around the drug store. Tom ain't much on manners and clothes but I betcher he'll be running for president or governor or something some of these days, and I'm gonter vote for him. As for 'sociating with him, I reckon I'd scare him to death if I tried to."

Frances went too fast for Lina, who was only beginning to register indignation over the possibility of her ever being a wall-flower when she found herself thinking she should defend the charming youths

who tipped their hats to her when she went to the drug store, which she managed to do very often. Before she could say a good word for said youths, Frances had plunged into a political campaign, warmly backing the despised Tom Collins for president or governor.

Frances and Lina were best friends, always had been and always would be, but two creatures more different in temperament did not exist. Lina was gentle, conventional, rather self righteous and smug, but with a warm heart and an intense love for babies and all helpless things. She had a domestic turn and the makings of a good wife and mother. Frances, on the other hand, was far from gentle and not at all polite or conventional. She was intelligent, quick witted, energetic, outspoken and a born leader. Her leanings were not at all towards the domestic things of life

but her inclinations were for the business world.

"I may marry some day," she had confided in Lina, "but it will not be until I've done a lot of other interesting things. I reckon I'll study law and be in the Supreme Court a while and maybe ambassadress to the Court of Saint James. I don't want to be president. It's too confining, but I'd rather like to be governor for a term. It'll teach you a lot to be governor. After that I may marry."

"Won't you be kinder old?" asked Lina timidly. Her friend's political ambitions always made Lina feel timid. It was almost as though she saw Frances up in the air, flying.

"Why not be old? When you are old you have some sense and can choose your husband sensibly."

"But it isn't a matter of choosing a

husband, it's a matter of his choosing you. If you are too old and too smart I reckon he won't be choosing you," said Lina. "There's one thing a woman can't do and that is propose."

"She can if she wants to. There's no law against it and if there was one the women could get busy and change it now that they can vote. If women have a right to have their say about who is to be

governor and president, I don't see why they can't have a finger in the pie when they want to marry a man. A president is certainly more important than nothing but a husband."

"But a president is not so pertinent as a husband," objected Lina.

"I reckon you mean permanent. So he isn't, and that's another reason why a woman ought to have more say-so about him. You can wait around all you want and marry some poor fish that comes crawling and begging, but I tell you I'm gonter look well about me and if I hear about some man that would make me the kind of husband I want, I betcher I'm gonter ask him how about it. He could say no if he didn't want to."

"But that wouldn't be gentlemanly," suggested Lina.

"It would be just as gentlemanly for

him to refuse me as it would be lady-like for you to refuse — say Jimmy Garner, should he ask you to marry him."

The above was the type of discussion that often occupied Lina and Frances as they walked, arms intertwined, up and down the sidewalk in front of their homes in the long summer twilight; Frances always advancing remarkable theories and Lina always obstructing and offering conventional objections to her friend's general up-and-coming ideas.

On this evening in early September, as the two strolled up and down, there was less accord than usual in their relations to each other. Frances seemed to be constantly shocking Lina and made no attempt to conceal her irritation when Lina was more than commonly smug. There were moments when Frances felt she would like to pinch her friend as she encircled her

prettily rounded waist, and Lina secretly hoped that the pin in her belt would accidentally scratch Frances's hand.

The candle in the woodhouse attic made a path of light along the Estes's yard, over the hedge and across the street. Every time the promenaders crossed this path of light Frances looked longingly towards the attic window. Finally she shook herself free from Lina's embrace and giving her dress an impatient yank, exclaimed:

"Darn this old skirt anyhow!"

"Now if you swear, Frances, you know my mother—"

"I'm not swearing and of course I know your mother perfectly well. Darn your mother, too. Darn my mother and Miss Minerva, and even Miss Cecilia if she is so sweet. Darn everybody that wears skirts. I wish I'd been a boy and could keep on playing forever in the woodhouse

attic with Billy and Jimmy and Tom Collins. Darn your pink dress with lace and all those fool rows of fool buttons. I'd swap all the pretty clothes on earth for one pair of khaki pants."

With which outburst Frances gave a dry sob, turned and ran into her home, leaving the astonished and mystified Lina standing in the path of light thrown by the candle in the woodhouse attic.

CHAPTER XII

SOME UNEXPECTED ARRIVALS

THE town was very quiet as the interurban bus rumbled through the suburbs and down Main Street, stopping at the hotel where the cramped passengers must alight. The bus was late, owing to many things, such as detours along the road, one blow out, not enough gas and finally a leaking radiator that must be repaired before the weary travelers could proceed.

In spite of the delays, Aunt Cindy had enjoyed the ride immensely.

"I don't git ter go often an' when I does go the longer I'm on the road the better I like it. How you gonter see the world if you sot down in one place all the time? I believe in goin' back an' fo'th,

to an' fro, pro an' con. But here we is, Wilkes Booth Lincoln! Wake up, Deci! We done got where we were a goin'."

"I'm a gonter go an' live with the white folks," crooned Deci. "I'm done come to live with Josephime! Yes, my Lawd, to live with Josephime!"

"Shet up, or you'll go back to the plantation as fas' as the bus kin fotch you!" threatened Aunt Cindy. But Deci had the supreme faith that having reached Heaven she could not be ejected for the reason of her rejoicing in a hymn of praise, and she continued her song in a low voice.

"Done come, done come to live with Josephime — yes, my Lawd, yes, my Lawd! Live an' die, live an' die, live with Josephime — die with Josephime — play with Josephime! Yes, my Lawd! Play all day with Josephine!"

"Humph!" grunted Aunt Cindy. "You's

done mistook, black gal. You are done come to town to live with white folks but you ain't gonter play all time — not while Cindy Jupiter Johnsin is up an' doin'. You're gonter learn to wuck jes' like Wilkes Booth Lincoln done learn to wuck. You gonter thank me some time for learnin' you to wuck."

The three were walking along the quiet, deserted streets, and all were heavily laden with lumpy bundles, bursting telescopes and battered old valises. Even little Decimus Ultimus must bear her share of the burdens — a pillow slip stuffed to repletion with her own scant and shabby belongings. When Aunt Cindy delivered the ultimatum concerning her method of bringing up colored children, Deci answered solemnly:

"I done said I was gonter wuck all day for Josephime. Wuckin' for her ain't noth-

in' but playin' for me. When I said play I meant wuck." Which remark showed the clever Deci to be a real diplomat.

When the travelers reached home they

found the house all closed and dark. The Major and Billy had long since retired and were sleeping the sleep of the old and young just. Aunt Cindy glanced up at the windows of the Major's room and

decided that her mistress had not yet returned. The muslin curtains, that were visible from the street light, had undoubtedly been tied into several knots to get them out of the way. The Major, like most men, hated curtains and when left to himself usually tied them in knots.

"I reckon we'll surprise Billy and the Major in the morning with a good hot breakfast. I'll haveter stir myself betimes to search out ingredients. I'll sho' be glad ter git to baid. I am that glad ter git back to my own house I could shout. Here, Wilkes Booth Lincoln, scratch under that there brick for my house key."

The key was found where the old woman had left it several weeks before and the house was opened and the lamp lit. Deci was duly impressed with the grandeur of Aunt Cindy's room.

"A room jes' to sleep in! Don't you

cook or wash an' iron or nothin' in here but jes' sleep? An' Wilkes Booth Lincoln got a room too, jes' to sleep in?"

"Yes, but his room ain't fixed up yet," said Aunt Cindy. "We'll git to that next. Wilkes Booth Lincoln, I reckon you'd bes' take this here quilt an' go sleep up in the woodhouse attic. Yo' cot is still up there. An' Deci, you kin make out on the sofy to-night."

"All by myse'f?" asked Deci. "I's scairt to sleep all by myse'f. I ain't never slep' out er a baid with three or fo' chilluns since I was bawn."

"Well, you is gonter start in this night a sleepin' by yo' se'f. You ain't a gonter sleep with me now nor never. I'm liable ter overlay what ever pusson gits in baid with me. You pull them paper bows off'n yo' kinks an' git into this yaller cotton shift an' crawl onto that sofa an' turn yo'

back on me an' my doin's an' go to sleep. Git!" and Deci got.

Wilkes Booth Lincoln was glad of a short respite allowed him in which to sleep in the woodhouse attic. With the quilt and a yellow cotton night shirt clasped to his contented bosom, he hastened to the room where he had spent many happy nights and days, nights in blissful uninterrupted slumber and days in play with his beloved Billy. After reaching the attic and depositing his belongings, he realized that he had no light. No doubt there was a candle-stick, but he had no matches. The boy much preferred going to bed in the dark to disturbing Aunt Cindy. Besides, it wasn't really dark. The night was clear, with a sky full of sparkling, dancing stars, and a late moon was due to rise at any moment.

"I reckon the boys, Billy an' Jimmy an'

maybe Tom Collins, have been a playin' up here," the boy decided as his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness and he began to pick out various objects in the low roofed room. On the table was a box-like contraption.

Morning would disclose what had been occupying the white boys in his absence. With a happy sigh, Wilkes Booth Lincoln wrapped the drapery of his couch about him and lay down to pleasant dreams. He stretched out his long, lean legs luxuriously. How good it was not to have Mirabile Dictu either over or under his feet. He flung wide his arms in glad freedom, glorying in the knowledge that Postle Peter and Pistle Paul were not lying by him. His last thought as he fell asleep was how glad Billy would be to see him. He could always depend on Billy.

If the town was quiet when the inter-

urban bus rumbled into it, it was deathly still as the high powered motor bearing Miss Minerva and her little daughter Josephine hummed through the residential streets and stopped at the Estes home. They, too, had experienced the vicissitudes of the road — detours, punctures, overheated engine and what not. They were several hours late in arriving, much to the mortification of the kind neighbor who had offered this means of transportation. But the point was they were home at last and very thankful to be there. They were deposited with their suit cases on the doorstep and the car hummed off down the sleeping street. Miss Minerva had insisted that the neighbor should not wait until the Major answered the door bell, her modesty picturing that gentleman appearing somewhat scantily attired. Indeed, not until the car was out of sight

did she press her finger on the electric bell button.

Her first pressure was a gentle one, hoping thereby to awaken the Major but to spare Billy. Then harder and harder she bore upon the button.

"Why, the bell isn't ringing!" she exclaimed. "I cannot hear a sound. Outrageous! I have recently had the batteries renewed and they should last for years and years."

"I reckon you'll have to beat an' bang," suggested Josephine, yawning prodigiously.

"I dislike exceedingly to beat and bang," said Mrs. Estes, irritably. "It is so vulgar to awaken the whole street with unseemly noises — after midnight, too. I'll first try knocking gently."

First a soft tap-tap, then a sharp rap-rap and still no sound of stirring within the house.

"Lemme whoop an' howl, Minerva. I can whoop an' howl loud enough to wake up dead folks."

"Not yet, Josephine! Get me a stick or a rock or something so that I may make a more decided knocking. An outcry might frighten your father."

"Humph! Not my daddy! He ain't scairt of nothing in all the world, but we can try knocking harder first before I take to whoopin' an' howlin'."

The little girl armed herself with both stick and stone and her mother renewed her efforts on the front door with the stick, with which she dealt resounding whacks. The noise only served to change the tenor of the Major's dreams, not to awaken him. He stirred uneasily, turned over and went on with his dream of living in a hollow tree with thousands of woodpeckers hammering around him.

"Why, I do believe your father and Billy are not at home, Josephine!" gasped the poor lady. "They could not sleep through such a noise."

"Le's go beat an' bang on the back door for a while," suggested Josephine, who was thoroughly awake now and enjoying herself extremely. It was exciting to be locked out in the dead of night and with no place to go. Anything exciting was welcome.

Their luck at the back door was no better than at the front. Miss Minerva beat with the stick and Josephine banged with the rock but there was no sound from within. Aunt Cindy heard the noise but heard it only in her dreams. She thought it was old Jimber-Jawed Jupiter knocking on her door and whining for drippings and molasses. It gave her immense satisfaction, even in her sleep, not to open the door.

Billy slept on, utterly unconscious of any disturbance. Wilkes Booth Lincoln and Decimus Ultimus were alike dead to the world. Next door the Garners and their household had a vague feeling that something was going on in the neighborhood, but since there were no cries for help, why worry?

"Lemme skin up the post, Minerva. I can do it as easy as anything," begged Josephine, "an' I can crawl up the roof an' get in Billy's room."

"Absurd! You can do no such thing!"

"I don't like to compredick, Minerva, but I done done it time an' again," confessed Josephine. "You ain't never said not to."

"Well I say not to now."

"All right, dearest! Then we'll jes' haveter camp out for the night. I don't mind that a bit. We can sleep on the

steps. Course if you 'low me to whoop an' howl I can wake up the dead, but it would be kinder unrefimed to have dead folks 'thout no back to their strouds a walkin' 'round. I heard Sarah Jane tellin' Aunt Cindy that none of the folks that died in her s'ciety, Lincoln No. 1, ever had no backs to their strouds."

"Oh, my darling, please don't talk so much foolishness. Let me think."

"Thain't no use in your thinkin', Minerva. I done thunk. I've made up my mind not to holler 'Help!' so we can get in our own home, but to holler 'Fire!' Folks always wake up when somebody hollers 'Fire!' They are 'fraid it might be them. I'm gonter begin!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE MIDNIGHT CONCERT

EFORE the distracted Minerva could protest, something else began. On the midnight air there arose the sound of a jazz band. My, how the trombone and cornet tooted, how the cymbals clashed and the drum rumbled! Josephine forgot to cry "Fire!" and began to dance like a dissolute little fairy. Even Mrs. Estes, severe and unbending, felt a thrill run through her frame and found herself involuntarily keeping time to the ungodly music. Whence came these rollicking sounds?

"I reckon Daddy an' Billy's gone to a party the reason they can't hear us a k n o c k i n'," said Josephine, shimmying

shamelessly in front of her mother. A dissipated looking gibbous moon had just risen over the roof of Aunt Cindy's house, weirdly lighting the scene of mother and daughter shut out from home.

"That's 'Last Night on the Back Porch' they're playin', Minerva. It's a splendid chune. I reckon it's meant for you an' me, cept'n 'tain't last night but to-night we're on the back porch."

What the persistent knocking had not done, the jazz music accomplished. It served to disturb the slumbers of the neighborhood. First it mingled with the dreams and then aroused the dreamers. The radio set, as is the way with radios, had mysteriously tuned in with some current of sound and a midnight frolic in Chicago was making itself heard in a town in Tennessee. WMAQ had picked out the little amateur set that Tom Collins had installed in the

woodhouse attic for the large sum of $10.80 (not counting Miss Minerva's batteries and Aunt Priscilla Pirtle's best ear trumpet,) and where other and expensive sets were either dead or static, the boys' instrument was proving itself one hundred percent perfect.

This perfection of sound transmission lasted only a short time, but it was long enough to arouse the neighborhood. Even Aunt Priscilla Pirtle, although she couldn't exactly hear, seemed to feel the vibrations. Bouncing out of her bed, she saw lights flashing through the house; first from Mr. and Mrs. Garner's room, then the halls, then Jimmy's room as electric buttons were touched by the startled inmates. The old lady seized her second best trumpet, the one she used for sermons, and the strains of "Last Night on the Back Porch" came faintly to her poor, deaf ears. Jimmy de-

clared afterwards that Aunt Priscilla shimmied when she heard the music, but one can hardly believe that.

Aunt Cindy rolled from her feather bed, on which she slept winter and summer, and padding to her front door opened it wide.

"Some devil's wuck a goin' on in this here town fur a p'rade to be a passin' this time er night — or mornin'. I ain't sho' which it is."

Decimus Ultimus's eyes flew wide open.

"Done got to Heaben! Done got to Heaben! Listen to the angels a playin' on the juice harps! Said I's gonter go live with Josephime — live with white folks. Lawdy! Lawdy! Done got to Heaben!"

"Shet up, you quackerbox!" threatened Aunt Cindy. "Shet up or I'll shet yo' mouth for you with the fire shubble. Shet up an' listen. I reckon some brass band

er fool nigger men air a seraphadin' Sarah Jane and her tut-tut dress."

Sarah Jane had also awakened and was opening her door at the identical moment that Aunt Cindy opened hers.

"Sompen done bust loose!" she declared. "I betcher that Jimmy done got hisself inter trouble." In a fine frenzy she rolled her eyes from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven. The second time around her roving eye took in the back yard of her neighbor and she saw her bed springs sticking above the roof line of the woodhouse attic.

"Look yonder! If there ain't my bed springs as big as life a floatin' in the firnament! The en' of the worl' is done come! An' me a sinner in a King Tut dress!"

The Major's dream had changed from woodpeckers to yellowhammers, to South African war dances with the natives beat-

ing wildly on tom-toms, and then suddenly he was wide awake and quite conscious that the knocking he had heard had been real knocking. But now the knocking had ceased and the back yard was full of music. He jumped from his bed, switched on the light and reached for his trousers. Whatever was happening, it was wise to be breeched.

Billy was one moment asleep, dreamless, and the next wide awake and fully aware that his beloved radio had tuned in with a wonderful jazz band. Having closed his eyes, realizing that he had forgotten to detach the batteries, the minute he opened them he jumped to the conclusion that the radio was doing its part.

"Hurrah! Listen! Maje, Maje, that's our radio whoopin' it up!" Billy also switced on his light and then rushed into the hall where he collided with the portly

form of Major Estes. The shock caused the Major to grunt loudly.

"No tellin' where it's coming from, Maje. It might be WBZ. That's Springfield. And it might be KFI. That's way out in Los Angeles. And it might be nothin' but WMC. That's just Memphis. We get Memphis easy as shootin'. Leastways we did one time. I reckon it was Memphis. I am real glad I forgot to unconnect the batteries. Oh, ain't it a grand an' glorious feelin'?"

All this was poured in the Major's ear as that rotund gentleman endeavored to regain his footing and his breath and find out what it was all about.

"And the knocking, Billy, what was all the knocking."

"I never heard any knocking. C'mon, Maje, let's go see what's doin'. I reckon it ain't more'n about nine o'clock. I

haven't been asleep but a minute. I was so tuckered out I hadter go to bed real early."

Down the steps he scrambled, clothed only in his pajamas, the Major stepping softly behind him. There was enough of the boy left in the old man for him to sympathize thoroughly with Billy. His own boyhood had antedated radio by many decades, but he recalled vividly an incident when he, with several other boys, fashioneed an aeolian harp and hung it on a weeping willow tree near a Negro burying ground and had waited nearby all night, hoping that the right gust of wind might arise and smite the tuned strings, and also hoping that when that psychological moment arrived that there would be some poor colored person handy who would be duly frightened. Worn out with their vigil, the boys had finally dropped asleep. Just before dawn a breeze had sprung up and

the harp had responded to its touch with soft, weird chords, thereby scaring the white boys as much as they had hoped to scare those of another color. Remembering this, the Major could appreciate Billy's eagerness.

Wilkes Booth Lincoln, the person nearest the music, really almost in the mouth of the loud speaker, lay petrified with fear and astonishment as the first strains of the jazz band burst upon him in the woodhouse attic. He had absolutely no idea whence it came. He had heard vaguely of radios, but had never seen one and knew nothing of the enterprise engaged in by Billy and his friends. He wanted to get up and run, but his limbs seemed weighted with millstones. Was he dead and could it be the angels playing on the harps? More like Gabriel blowing his trumpet, the boy decided as the trombones came in strong.

"Why, it's 'Last Night on the Back Porch'!" he exclaimed. "That ain't no hymerpraise. Somebody's down in the woodhouse a tootin'."

Suddenly the music ceased and a terrifying wail came from the corner, a wail and then a screech and then a great noise like a gargantuan cough. It was nothing but static, something any radio bug recognizes and deplores and endeavors to ignore, but to the colored youth, who was all unconcious of there being a radio in his room and knew nothing of the idiosyncrasies of the unperfected machine, it meant nothing less than something huge and terrifying having caught something, he knew not what. He had heard a wounded mule make a noise a little like it, but a mule could never have squeezed itself through the trap door.

He remembered the first night he had

ever spent in the woodhouse attic and his childish fright over the Flabby Man, and how the Major had come up through the trap door and how kind the old man had been to him. He would go to him now; go immediately. He felt he must hurry or the Thing would get him. He tried not to be frightened, but to be manly, as he knew Billy would have been and as the Major would want him to be. But it was difficult when the creature somewhere in the dark corners of the room continued to scream and cough and belch. The moon was shining in one of the little windows and the place was quite light as Wilkes Booth Lincoln raised himself up gingerly in his cot and steeled himself to take a look around his bedchamber.

"Nothin' atall there!" he shuddered. "I'd ruther to see it than jes' hear it." Another piercing static screech proved too

much for the poor boy, who was trying very hard to be brave, and he let out a blood-curdling yell for help.

"Help! Help! Gawd in Heaven, help!

Billy! Major! Aunt Cindy! Anybody! Help! Help!"

Wilkes Booth Lincoln's cry for help coincided precisely with the opening of the kitchen door and the appearance on the back porch of the Major and Billy.

"Minerva!" was the Major's astonished exclamation.

"Joseph!" from his wife.

Billy waited for no greetings but flew to the woodhouse attic. The portly form of Aunt Cindy, wrapped in a quilt and filling her doorway, gave Billy to understand that the cry for help came from his dear Wilkes Booth Lincoln, who no doubt was sleeping in his old chamber for the time being. His colored friend was perhaps in danger, or thought he was, and it behooved the white boy to rescue him immediately. Up the ladder-like steps he clambered and was in the attic room before Wilkes Booth Lincoln could get his breath for another yell.

"Ohh!! Bi-hi-hil-ly!" cried the boy. "It might git you! Look out, Billy! It already done strangled a mule ghost."

The radio, as though recognizing its

master, subsided the moment Billy's head appeared in the trap door.

"Hello, Nicky, I sure am glad to see you home again! I don't blame you for gettin' scared at that unearthly noise, but it ain't a thing but our new radio. I meant to surprise you with it but I didn't know it would get a goin' in the middle of the night."

Such another interchange of explanations had never before taken place after midnight in that town in Tennessee.

Miss Minerva must explain how she happened to be at home at that hour. The Major must explain how he happened to be so sound asleep that he could not hear her persistent knocking. Then Miss Minerva demanded an explanation concerning the front door bell's not ringing when the batteries had only recently been renewed with a guarantee for running half

a lifetime. Of course Billy must then explain about his borrowing the batteries for his radio; explain and apologize and promise to return them in the morning.

The Garners slipped through the gap in the dividing hedge, followed by Aunt Priscilla Pirtle, her next best ear trumpet so firmly fixed it looked as though it might be growing out of her ear, so determined was she not to lose one word of what it was all about. Sarah Jane did not try to squeeze through the gap. She contented herself by resting her voluminous bosom on top of the clipped hedge and making rumbling threats in regard to her bed springs. She now realized that they were not floating in the firmament, but had been securely wired to the roof and were in some mysterious manner connected with the music and the screechings that had so aroused the neighborhood.

Jimmy pacified Sarah Jane with wheedling and promises of having charmed away the chinches for good and all. He found it a much more difficult matter to explain to Aunt Priscilla Pirtle how he happened to borrow her best ear trumpet. He had hoped he could return it peacefully and secretly in the morning, but that old lady, when she realized that various other things had been borrowed to complete the devil machine, suddenly divined that her trumpet must be in the woodhouse attic. Jimmy found it very difficult to explain to Aunt Priscilla. When he tried to tell her how it was, she removed her second best trumpet from her ear and did all the talking herself.

Then came Aunt Cindy's turn for explanations. She must tell how the spirit moved her to hurry back from the plantation and try to get the house in order before the return of her mistress; how she

had hoped to arrive before dark but had been delayed by all the mishaps to the "interbourban" bus. Then in the midst of her explanations, which were given from her front door, where she stood wrapped in her quilt, Decimus Ultimus crawled into view, having discovered a spot near the sill that was not quite filled by Aunt Cindy's plumpness. And how was the old woman to explain away the little colored girl?

She had planned to introduce the subject quite tactfully the following day, but contrary to her wishes the child had introduced herself. The radio itself had not created any more surprise and consternation than did Deci. After crawling through the weakness that her guardian had inadvertently allowed in the barricade, Deci jumped to her feet and shrilled forth:

"Done come to live with the white folks! Praise the Lawd, I done come! Done lef'

the country an' come to town to live with Josephime! I done talked 'bout Heaben an' got there!"

Before the tired and overwrought Miss Minerva could say a word or do more than gasp her astonishment, Josephine rushed to greet her colored friend.

"Now see! See, dearest Minerva, I done prayed better than you! I been a knowin' all the way home that my prayers were a-beatin' your prayers 'cause I never stopped. An' now God has sent my own dear Deci to live with me."

Then the child ran and threw herself in her mother's arms, crying: "Oh, my dear Minerva, God is so good."

Miss Minerva could but agree with her darling, and so it was that Deci was allowed to remain in her earthly paradise.

CHAPTER XIV

MISS MINERVA'S SACRIFICES

IT seemed to Miss Minerva that she had spent all the first part of her life on this earth making up her mind that she would never do certain things, and now she was spending the last part doing all of those things she had determined never to do. First, she had made up her mind that she would never allow a male to live under her roof — and along came William Green Hill. Of course it was her duty to have the boy live with her, since he was an orphan, and duty was ever that lady's watchword.

Marriage had been one of the other things she had declared against, and along came the Major. Duty again! Her

nephew needed the male fist in his raising, not that the dear Major ever used his fist on anybody or anything — except perhaps to pound the railing around the jury box to force his legal argument home.

Another thing that had obsessed Minerva, the spinster, was no colored servants in her household. First she had to give in on this point when poor little Wilkes Booth Lincoln ran away from the plantation searching for his dear Billy. This happened directly on the heels of Minerva, spinster, becoming Minerva, the matron. Then Aunt Cindy quickly followed Wilkes Booth Lincoln and became queen of the kitchen.

Of course the advent of Josephine broke down other barriers which that lady flattered herself were impregnable. Many and various were the attacks made by that golden haired elf, who looked not at all like

a battering ram but whose methods resembled one very much in that she persisted in knocking, knocking, knocking in the same place on her mother's fortifications until she broke through. Witness the retention of Deci. Miss Minerva had declared over and over again that the colored child should never come and live with the Estes family, yet here she was quite as much at home as Major Estes himself. Josephine's exclamation concerning the goodness of God had been too much for her mother.

Aunt Cindy had very tactfully endeavored to make her mistress understand that Deci had come to town only for a little visit.

"Jes' to keep me comp'ny until you got back home, Miss Minerva." Aunt Cindy realized that the way to get Miss Minerva's "back up," as she expressed it, would be

to tell her of Peruny Pearline's machinations concerning her two children. She was sure that her mistress would consider it impertinent and overbearing, and more than likely would send both Wilkes Booth Lincoln and Decimus Ultimus back to the plantation. She told the Major, however, and that worthy husband and father agreed with Aunt Cindy that "the least said, soonest mended."

Other things that Miss Minerva had declared against, with all the force of a strong character, were victrolas, pianolas and automobiles, as well as pets of all description. The pet abominations were soon upon her in the shape of billy goats, ponies, dogs, cats, canary birds, rabbits and goldfish. A victrola and pianola now graced her otherwise virtuous parlor; and where those two go, dancing is sure to follow. Dancing had always been looked upon by the stern Mi-

nerva as wicked beyond words, and now her nephew and daughter both went to dancing school. She had long ago overcome her feeling concerning automobiles and even ran her own little Ford coupe.

As for this radio, she did not at all approve of it. Her introduction to the instrument had been an unfortunate one. Jazz music, which had made even her feel like dancing, must be wicked! It was all very well for Billy to tell her she could hear sermons over his machine every Sunday. She could go to church and hear sermons a-plenty. What sermons she might hear would not at all counteract the other things that all of the family might hear; such as wild dance music, rough vaudeville songs, returns from the boxing matches and other things which were a disgrace to Christianity.

Minerva had not decided that the radio could stay. Having given in concerning

Decimus Ultimus, she felt that it behooved her to take a firm stand on something and the radio looked as though it were doomed. She said nothing about it on that first night, feeling it wiser to let the family get to bed as fast as possible. Perhaps it would not be so objectionable as she feared. At any rate, a few days would show.

Deci determined that if good behavior would keep her in this earthly paradise she would stay. Never was there such a good and helpful little person as that colored child, nor one so polite. It was "Yes ma'am!" "No ma'am!" "Please ma'am!" "Thank you ma'am!" at every breath. Her eyes were wide open to see where she might help Aunt Cindy and her ears ever on the alert to catch a suggestion of service to any member of the household.

Old Aunt Blue-gum Tempy would have been both pleased and astonished to see her

grandchild's company manners. No doubt Deci would have been more helpful at home had there not been so many brothers and sisters and had she not discovered that it was a fatal thing in their cabin to show one's self too capable. Witness the older sister, Ann Step And Go Fetch It. Had not willingness to do for others been her stumbling block in life? This being willing to do for white folks was a horse of another color. According to Deci's astute reasoning, it was advantageous to help white folks and those having influence with white folks, like Aunt Cindy.

Deci belonged to Josephine as much as though the war between the states had never been fought and the proclamation freeing the slaves had never been made.

"I done come up here to b'long to you an' I b'longs to you jes' as much as Flumpy or Brownie or yo' doll baby. My gran'-

mammy done tol' us time an' agin how she uster b'long to Billy's pappy's mammy's sister, an' that's the way I'm gonter b'long to you. What you tell me to do I does, an' what you tell me to stop, I leaves off."

When Billy was a little boy and came to live with his Aunt Minerva, it had been a great disappointment to that lady that she could not make a good housewife of her nephew. She had every idea of bringing him up as a perfect lady, but Billy had proved too much for her. He took no interest in butter making or cooking and scorned the doll baby she bought him. When Miss Minerva's baby came, and came a girl, the fond mother determined that the daughter should be domestic above everything. She gave up trying to make a sissy of Billy and turned all her energies toward making a good housekeeper of Josephine.

A small hall room had been fitted up by the fond parents, with every known device for making housekeeping a pleasure to a little girl. There was a bed big enough for a real baby, with all of the bed clothes, bolsters and pillows a grown-up bed might boast. Here their darling might lēarn to make up a bed after the approved manner. There was a highboy and a bureau whose drawers must be kept tidy. There was a table and four diminutive chairs and a china press. Of course there was china and silver and table linen, a most important part in good housekeeping.

When the room had been fitted up for Josephine's seventh birthday, there had been much discussion between the Major and his good wife whether or not a cook stove should be included in the furnishings. It was finally decided that the stove could be there but the child must be made to

understand that she must never have a fire in the tiny wood range unless an older person was with her. At first Lina Hamilton, who was never so happy as when being domestic, used to come and play with her little neighbor. Lina was such a careful soul, and it was deemed all right to have a fire and really cook. But lately Lina had been too grown-up to think of such games and Josephine could only pretend to cook on the pretty little stove, unless her mother or Aunt Cindy had time to come in the play room and superintend. However, the very presence of grown-ups destroyed all pleasure in the game of housekeeping.

Deci was wild with delight over this play room. She immediately suggested a thorough house cleaning, with Josephine as mistress and herself as a poor widder ooman with ten chilluns who was a wuckin' out by the day. Mistress and maid scrubbed

and scoured, rearranging bureau drawers and china cabinet and even turning the bed upside down in a vain hunt for the unmentionables that Deci seemed to think must infest all beds, whether slept in by dolls or duchesses.

Mrs. Estes looked in on the children several times during the morning, and once Aunt Cindy climbed the stairs to see that all was well and that the colored gal was not giving white folks, young or old, any back talk. She agreed with her mistress that the little girls were having a happy, wholesome time and that the coming of Decimus Ultimus had been a fortunate thing for all concerned. Josephine had arrived at a rather difficult age, not contented unless she had some form of amusement provided for her constantly, and Deci was most ably and amply providing that amusement.

"They seem to be quite safe, too, Aunt Cindy," said Miss Minerva.

"Sho' they's safe. Jes' listen at 'em, chatterin' like blackbirds. You go on to yo' chu'ch meetin', Miss Minerva, an' I'll look after them chilluns. Can't nothin' happen to 'em. I'm gonter be right here in the kitchen tendin' to these her damson 'serves. I'll give 'em a little snack long 'roun' 'leven o'clock with some bread an' a few 'serve skimmin's. I'll let 'em eat they victuals up in the play room. Billy's out fixin' up his radium. Yessum, he done got the batteries connected up with the do' bell an' that there Jimmy Garner's done toted back his ol' great aunt's year trumpet.

"They say the ol' lady is pow'ful rampagious 'bout it, an' Sarah Jane is carryin' on worse about them ol' saggy bed springs than she did that time Billy an' Jimmy got theyselves hooked up together in her cor-

sets. She thinks that there own chil' er hers, Benny Dick, can't do no wrong an' that Jimmy can't do no right. I can't make out that ooman. 'Tain't nachul for a colored ooman to be so partial to her own flesh an' blood. Sometimes I think there mus' be some kinder scan'le 'bout that there Benny Dick an' he ain't Sarah Jane's own son. My opinion is she ain't above nothin', what with her tut-tut dress an' washin' out las' week's clothes of a Saturday."

The little girls played happily through the morning. The play room shone with their labors. Everything was clean and in order; even the dolls were dressed in fresh clothes and the beloved dog, Flumpy, sported a new bow on his collar. Even Aunt Cindy would have been pleased.

"Now!" exclaimed Deci, looking around for new worlds to conquer. "Whefo' we

don't cook some victuals on that bitser cook stove?"

"We can cook 'tend like, but my mother an' Aunt Cindy won't let me even strike a match unless some older person is with me."

"You dont haveter strike the match. I'll do the strikin an' what am I if I ain't a older pusson than what you is? I was bawn long time befo' what you was. I ain't as tall as you, but I'm a whole heap older. The reason I ain't no taller is because I ain't had room in the baid ter grow. My gran'mammy says chilluns grow mostly at night times when folks can't see 'em a growin'. Sometimes they grows in the day times when they hiccoughs. She 'lows one reason I ain't no bigger'n I am is because she uster give me a piece er fat bacon to suck when I was a baby an' she'd tie one end of a string onter it an' the other end she'd tie to my toe so's if I got to swallowin'

the bacon whole I could kick it out. An' gran-mammy says she reckons I kicked so much I kicked all the growin' suption outer my victuals. Anyhow I makes fires lots er times for my gran'mammy an' I could make a fire in that little bitser stove so's it would cook as cute as cute."

Josephine's mind worked quickly, and when she determined to do something she did it immediately. There was no procrastination in her make-up. Deci's announcement that she was an older person, and that it was therefore perfectly proper for them to cook in the little stove, got almost instant action out of Josephine.

"All right! You get the chips and start the fire. I'll go beg something to cook from Aunt Cindy. Aunt Cindy can't never 'fuse me nothing. She's gonter give us a snack anyhow of damson skimmin's."

"Ain't you scairt she'll stop us from

makin' the fire?" asked Deci. "You better not let on."

"Guess you're right. I reckon I'd better hook the things."

"Whatcher gonter hook?"

"Oh, meal an' flour an' lard and apples. I think it would be cute to make a apple pie. I got salt an' sugar an' spices up here in my ki'chen cabinet."

"Kin you make a pie?" asked Deci.

"Sho' I can if I've a mind to. I can do pretty near anything I got a mind to. Can't you?"

"I ain't so sho' 'bout apple pies. I kin cook some things real good, so my gran'-mammy says. She done learned me how ter fry feesh."

"Fry fish?"

"Yes'm! I rolls 'em in cawn meal an' fries 'em in a hot skillet 'thout so very much drippin's. Feesh sho' am good eatin's."

"I gotter idea!" exclaimed Josephine. "Let's catch all of my goldfish an' fry 'em. They ain't a thing but tiresome fools anyhow. I jes' hate an' 'spise 'em, but my mother thought they'd be such nice, quiet, refined pets. She thought maybe I'd give up Flumpy an' take to lovin' goldfish. I told her I'd just as soon try to make friends with that sweet potato vine she rooted in water to train over the mantlepiece."

"How you goner ketch 'em?" asked Deci, her black eyes shining and her wrapped plaits bobbing up and down as she jumped with excitement. "Sometimes we ketches feesh with bent pins down to the plantation an' sometimes the men folks goes out an' ketches a whole heap er them with nets."

"Well we want a whole heap, all there are in the bowl, so let's catch them in a net. My mother's hair net would do fine

—one of the double mesh ones. I reckon wettin' won't hurt it much."

Decimus Ultimus was like her brother, Wilkes Booth Lincoln, in that she was a born fire maker. In a short while the little stove was red hot and the diminutive frying pan in just the right condition for the purloined lard to sizzle delightfully when Deci dropped a bit in to test it.

The goldfish submitted to their fate philosophically. They swam into the hair net joyously, and when they were landed jumped up and down in glee; at least that was what Josephine decided was the reason for their flopping about so wildly.

"Tain't no use ter scale these little bitser feesh," Deci declared. "The scales air as tinder as kin be an' pure gol' besides. I'll rip out some er they innards but they ain't got many."

She salted them carefully, peppered

them daintily, rolled them heavily in corn meal and then popped them into the skillet. There were six in all, varying in size from three to five inches.

The fish were fried long before the apple

pie got baked. In fact the pie never did get all the way done, as the tiny stove was a better fryer than baker. But the dolls who were invited to the luncheon didn't mind at all, and Flumpy most oblig-

ingly ate all the guests left on their plates. Josephine and Deci picked the bones of the little fish and Flumpy, always obliging, licked their fingers clean.

Miss Minerva stuck to the old custom of dinner at two o'clock, as did the majority of the people in her town. It wasn't a very convenient hour for the school children, as it meant coming in a little late and having food either cold and clammy or kept hot and dried up. However, school had not opened on that day that Josephine and Deci had given the party to the dolls, so the whole family were in their places on the stroke of the hour. The Major unfolded his napkin and beamed genially over the silver caster with its cut glass cruets of vinegar, oil, and red and black peppers.

"What's this?" cried the Major.

"Roast beef to carve! I could swear I smelled fish frying as I came in the door."

"I, too, fancied I detected the odor of fish," said the mistress. "I must speak to the grocer about that last lard I purchased. I am afraid it is a little bit — er — er — "

"Fishy!" suggested Billy.

Suddenly, without any warning, Josephine burst into tears and jumping from her seat hurled herself onto the Major's empty stomach.

"My darling, what is it?" he comforted, putting down the carving knife.

"Oh, Daddy, Daddy, I'm a cannibal. I done et my goldfish — et 'em all up so's there ain't even no bones left to tell the fish tail. I et 'em up an' liked 'em better'n I ever did when they were 'live. I kinder thought they liked to be et up whilst I was a eatin' 'em, but now somehow they're jest a flip floppin' in my tummy like they

want to get out. Oh, Daddy, Daddy! I reckon I'm gonter die for bein' a cannibal. I feel like the little fish done turned back to pure gold inside me, they're flip floppin' so heavy."

Goldfish may be more indigestible than other fish or Josephine may have swallowed a bone, or the combination of damson jam skimmings and half raw pie crust may have been disastrous. At any rate the poor little girl had a bad quarter of an hour, so bad that her mother and father never had the heart to reprimand her very severely for having really and truly cooked on the tiny wood range. Deci, however, was not at all ill. Her little tummy seemed to be able to take care of any incongruities she chose to put in it, but what Aunt Cindy said to her concerning making the fire and catching and frying the goldfish was enough to make the child's wrapped plaits stand

on end. But Decimus Ultimus was a true philosopher and reader of character, and she had discovered early in action that Aunt Cindy was all bark and no bite.

"Didn't you tell me always to mind white folks?" she asked. Deci knew Aunt Cindy's weak spot and she intended to make the most of the possibilities.

"Yes, an' you'd better do as I say," grumbled Aunt Cindy, sensing that she was losing ground.

"Well, didn't Josephime say to me: 'Deci, you run an' pick up chips an' make me a nice, hot fire. You's older than I is an' my mother says I kin have a fire in my little bitser stove if somebody older than what I is is with me an' kin strike the matches? An' didn't she say: 'Deci, kin you fry feesh? 'Cause if you kin I'm a gonter ketch my gol' feesh an' fry 'em 'cause I jes' nachully 'spises them a swim-

min' 'roun' in that glass dish.' An' I 'members what you say 'bout my mindin' white folks an' not jawin' back an' I fotch the chips an' built the fire jes' like Josephime tells me to, an' then I fried the feesh the way my gran'mammy done larnt me an', Aunt Cindy, they sho' were tasty."

CHAPTER XV

DOMESTIC RELATIONS

RADIO! Radio! Poor Miss Minerva, she hated the name of it! It seasoned every meal, interrupted every conversation. The family no longer lived in her house but in the woodhouse attic, coming home only to snatch hasty meals and reluctantly to retire. Even the Major had been known to sneak out of bed after midnight to hear WSAI, in other words Cincinnati, broadcast the jazziest of jazz music. As the autumn weather came on clear and crisp, the little home-made instrument "Did its derndest," as Billy expressed it.

Lessons were neglected, tasks left undone, all because of radio. All of the waking hours not spent in the attic by Billy

and Jimmy were utilized in either telephoning to each other what WHAS had offered the evening before or how WSB was specializing in bedtime stories for next week, or how one of them had "most got PWX, Havana, Cuba, but some dirty sucker had chuned in on 'em an' mixed it all up an' ol' WMC, Memphis, was as far as it would reach for the night."

Wilkes Booth Lincoln was as radio mad as the white boys. He got over his fright and now loved the instrument as much as he had feared it. He shirked his chores shamefully. Splitting kindling was the one task he did not neglect, and that was because he could do that in the woodhouse and at the same time listen to the concerts received in the room above. Even Aunt Cindy would sneak out and sit at the foot of the attic steps and peel potatoes. Deeply she regretted that she was too fat to get

through the trap door. Of course Josephine and Deci spent much time with the wonderful instrument, so much that as the weather grew colder Miss Minerva was ever miserable for fear her darling would catch her death of cold.

The small, cheap machine, that had been originally installed by Tom Collins, soon must make way for a more ambitious instrument. There was talk of resistance coupled amplifiers and of de luxe low loss condensers. Of course, since Aunt Pauline Pirtle claimed her best ear trumpet, a loud speaker must be bought. A high luster, black deckled enamel horn took ten dollars of the money Jimmy and Billy had put in the savings bank. A battery in the place of the ones borrowed from Miss Minerva's door bell must also be bought. Their deposits were dwindling decidedly, but the radio bug had bitten them badly and what

cared they for mere money in the bank when at the turn of a screw they could jump from Chicago to New York and then leap over mountains, rivers and plains and land in Dallas, Texas?

Frances had been looking longingly in the direction of the woodhouse ever since the night of the big surprise, when Miss Minerva and Aunt Cindy arrived in time for the little radio to show what it could do in the way of receiving concerts and waking up all the neighbors. The more Lina locked arms with her and drew her towards the drug store soda fountain, the more Frances pulled back and longed to be one of the boys again. One Saturday afternoon she could stand it no longer and she jerked her arm free from the clinging Lina and with a whoop was over the hedge and running towards the woodhouse. Lina looked sadly after her friend. Then with a

sigh she turned to her home and went up to her room, where she practiced various ways of doing her hair until the supper bell rang.

Billy was cordially glad to see Frances. Jimmy was glad, but sarcastically so. At first Tom Collins was sullen and angry at the presence of the female interloper, but he was gradually forced into good humor when Frances proved herself to be a real help in installing the new radio. She actually knew which way to turn a screw and showed an intelligence rarely seen in girls in regard to electric wires. She was a good climber, too, and thought nothing of crawling out on the roof to help Billy with the aerial that must be set up to take the place of the irate Sarah Jane's bed springs.

"Dern if she ain't as good as Tom Boy Taylor," Tom said to Billy after Frances had been ordered from the roof by poor,

anxious Mrs. Black. "Tom Boy Taylor is my fav'rite female character in fiction," grinned Tom. "If there were more gals like Tom Boy, I wouldn't mind 'em so much."

Tom Collins had of late begun to read fiction, having heretofore confined himself to books about birds and beasts and insects. Stories of adventure appealed to him, especially the ones where the women were left out. His latest find was Huckleberry Finn. He read it and re-read it and then put it in easy reach on his rough home-made book shelf, with the intention of returning to its fascinating pages in the near future.

"That there Huck Finn kinder favors me," he said to Billy. "We got the same onery paps an' the ladies of the town got the same itch to clean up Huck an' me. Of course in the book Huck's ol' man had the

grace to go off an' die an' I reckon my ol' man'll be here to put copper cents on *my* eyes. He's done embalmed himself in corn licker so that he'll last forever. I ain't a sayin' I want the ol' man to die. Fact is, I believe I'd mo'n likely miss the ol' cuss. He don't git near so playful with his black-snake whip a wrappin' it around my legs an' shoulders as he useter. I wonder why when he gets drunk he's always a hollerin' that it's his'n an' not mine. Billy, I'd give a dollar to know what it is that is his'n.

"He better not git to monkeyin' with my house or I'll make him sorry. Truth is, Billy, I'm lots stronger now than what my ol' man is an' I reckon he knows it an' that's why he's done let up on the whip. The Widder Leary is always hangin' over our gate these days. I believe in my soul she's makin' up to Pap. Brought him a

pie yesterday, cept'n she called it a 'poy.' Such a pie as it was! All soggy on the bottom an' burnt on the top, with sliced raw apples on the inside an' dough twisted into whatcher call true-lover's-knots all stuck around on the rim.

"I guess she's after his pension an' maybe the house an' lot. If she catches the ol' man she can come into her prop'ty soon if she keeps on feedin' him the likes of that pie. He wouldn't outlast mo'n six of them if they do him as bad as that one did. He was hungry because of Fat Molly's not havin cooked up nothin' for quite a spell an' because of his stomic's turnin' aginst bolony sausage an' cheese an' what we could buy ready cooked in a can. He sat down an' et the whole blame pie an' it looked like it tied up his innards into true-lovers'-knots like them on the pie. If the Widder Leary could er heard his langidge con-

cernin' her an' her pie, I guess it'd give her an' her love makin' quite a set back."

"I reckon you'd hate to have her for a stepmother," said Billy. "She don't know how to be nice to anything but goats."

"She couldn't stepmother me," said Tom, scornfully. "I'd get up an' git before ever the preacher pronounced her Mrs. Collins. I ain't overly fond of washin', but I'd wash my hands of both Pap an' the widder if they ever jine hands."

"And go off and leave your house, Tom? I don't see how you could do it. I reckon the Widow Leary would pull it down and burn up all your things, and I betcher she'd keep a pig, maybe a whole litter of pigs, down on your branch. She's just the kind of old woman that would want to smell up everything with hogs."

"I'd hate that," declared Tom. "She

can make what she wants out of Pap's pension, but I don't want her messin' up the little stream. I'm a gonter turn my 'tention to breakin' off the match since you've mentioned the branch. That water has meant 'bout all there is to me ever since I could toddle. I don't even mind washin' much if I can do it in the branch. It sings such a pretty little tinkly tune an' it looks like it's such a spunky little stream, runnin' along an' keepin itself so decent right down there by the dirty ol' dump."

Tom's eyes, usually so bold and black, had a telltale mist in them as he opened his heart to Billy. Then he added:

"I don't know what I'd a done, Billy, if it hadn't a been for you an' that bit of branch. I guess Mark Twain, the feller what wrote Huck Finn, coulder said what I'm tryin' to say 'bout you bein' kinder

like that stream in my life. Oh shucks, Billy, I ain't no softy to be a talkin this-away, but I'd hate to see my little baby crick turned inter a hog wallow same as I'd hate to see you grow up inter a man like —like my ol' Pap."

Tom's confession of his affection touched Billy and he could not forget the look in the boy's black eyes at the thought of the little creek being turned into a hog wallow. Billy finally mentioned the matter to Frances, who was much easier to talk to about a matter concerning the heart than Jimmy. Frances was such a resourceful young person that Billy felt she might see a way out of the difficulty for their friend, Tom. The girl listened attentively.

"Gee, that is hard lines for poor Tom. I'm mighty glad you told me, Billy. I reckon we can fix it up somehow. I've got an idea."

Of course she would have! Frances always did have an idea, and what was more, her ideas were usually good and practical, not just dreams, but plans that would work. With Frances Black an idea meant immediate action, so her: "Come on, Billy, let's get busy!" was rather what Billy expected.

"All right — but how?"

"I reckon we'll have to go see Judge Turpin for some law points an' p'raps my mother won't mind my going if you go along with me."

"Sure, but Maje attends to all my legal business," grinned Billy.

"But this is different! Don't argue, but come along."

The Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court, where justice was so well administered by the wise young judge, Tom Turpin, was on the point of closing for the

day when a breathless Frances and Billy slipped in the door. The Juvenile Court was held in the parlors of an old house that had belonged to one of the leading families of the county. The stately rooms, with their fine old mantles and deep windows, had been indelibly impressed on the minds of Frances and Billy, although they had seen them but once and that when they were little children.

"Gee, Frances, 'member that time we all of us got arrested?" asked Billy.

"I'll never forget it to my dying day, Billy. Do you remember how Jimmy made the court laugh? It was that gettin' arrested that made me decide then an' there I'd be a lawyer when I grew up an' by'n'by be a judge — first a common ordinary judge, and then a judge of the Supreme Court of United States. Of course I'd want to be a criminal lawyer sometime in my career."

"Of course," agreed Billy, his eyes twinkling. Just then Miss Lindsay, the probation officer, came in and discovered the young persons before Frances had time to ask Billy what he was laughing about.

"We just want to see the judge a minute," Frances explained to Miss Lindsey.

"Court is adjourned for the day," smiled Miss Lindsey, "but perhaps your business is private and not connected with the court."

"Well, it's private first, but it may be connected with the court later on if it ain't attended to. Anyhow, I'd like mightily to speak to Judge Turpin. It ain't personal private — but what you might call preventative work," explained Frances, who felt rather proud of all the syllables she was able to get into preventative.

Judge Turpin came at Miss Lindsey's summons, looking a little tired from a hard day's work but his face brightened when he saw Frances and Billy, both of them prime favorites.

"Well, how's Judge Black?" He always called Frances, Judge Black. "Which is the culprit? Been stealing any more babies? Court's over for the day but we might as well sit down and take things easy. What's the matter? You two are getting so grown-up you'll soon be too old for the Juvenile Court."

"It's Domestic Relations this time," said Frances. "Billy an' I are worried 'bout something an' somehow I've got a notion you are the one to straighten things out. 'Tain't us that's in trouble, but a friend of ours who's liable to be. Looks to me like a court like yours ought to keep folks from getting into trouble — if it's really

any good — instead of waiting until they're in trouble and then pulling them out. Ain't that so?"

"Perhaps," answered Jurge Turpin solemnly. "Proceed."

"Tom Collins,who lives over on the Dump, has got a terrible old father who drinks and swears and beats Tom and never washes. Old Mr. Collins has a pension for some war or other he fought in, but goodness knows which or when."

"Spanish-American, I fancy," laughed Judge Turpin.

"May be! Anyhow, old Mr. Collins not only has a pension but he owns a tumbledown little house right on the edge of the Dump. There's a nice, big, green yard that runs down hill and has a little creek at the bottom. Now Tom is a real nice boy — er —, not 'zactly nice, but kinder interesting. He has a whole lot of

sense 'bout some things an' not a bit 'bout others — anyhow he hasn't got a bit of use for silliness. Now the two things that Tom likes best in the world are this pretty

little branch at the foot of the yard and Billy Hill here. The rest of the folks he just tolerates."

"Umhum! Go on," suggested the judge, gravely wagging his head.

"I'm getting there, but I had to present the case first. Now there is a terrible old Irish woman over on the Dump, called the Widow Leary. This old woman has got it into her head that she's gonter marry old Collins, and she bakes him soggy pies with true-lovers' knots made out of heavy pastry and he sits up and eats a whole pie at a time. Now Mrs. Leary doesn't love old Collins a mite — 'cause nobody could love him — but what she loves is the pension and the nice yard with the stream. What she's meaning to do is put a pig pen in the yard and make a hog wallow out of Tom's lovely brook. Now I ask you, Judge Turpin, wouldn't that be a sin and a shame?"

"It would, Judge Black, it would indeed!" agreed Judge Turpin. "But what can I do about it?"

"I don't know, but I'd like you to take

the case under advisement. I tell you one thing, if you let the Widow Leary do such a bad thing I won't answer for Tom's future standing as a citizen. It'll make a bad man out of a good boy. There must be some way and I've heard grown people say that your court was meant to keep people from going wrong. If that's so, this is the time to act."

Judge Turpin smiled and turned to Billy.

"What would you do about it, Billy?" Billy had been an interested but silent listener while Frances presented the case.

"I reckon I'd look into the matter an' see if Ol' Collins had the right to leave his pension to anybody an' if Tom didn't have any say-so 'bout the property. The widow don't want ol' Collins for anything but what he can leave her an' Tom says six more of those pies would fix any eater."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Judge Turpin. "Collins, you say, and the house is on Westwood Road which runs by the Dump? Wait a minute — no, come back here into my private office."

In the corner of the private office was a filing case containing Tom Turpin's papers and notes on legal business before he came into office. Quickly running through the files, the judge drew forth a memorandum.

"Now isn't this the most remarkable coincidence? See here, youngsters! When I was first admitted to the bar I had a job of running down the title for a piece of property for a possible factory site. It was this very land in question. I found it belonged to one Thomas Collins, a minor, left to him by a maternal aunt. Here it all is and I fancy the Widow Leary's matrimonial aspirations will be very con-

siderably dampened by this bit of information."

"Oh, Judge Turpin, I knew all the time you could fix things right," cried Frances. "Must we go right over to the Dump and tell the Widow Leary that she'll make a big mistake if she marries old Collins?"

"Well, hardly that! I think the best thing to do would be to tell Tom that he really owns the place and let him do as he thinks fit. I fancy Tom can control the situation himself."

CHAPTER XVI

THE TRAGEDY OF DISCIPLINE

IT REMAINED to be proved whether or not Tom could control the situation, but there was one thing sure — he could not control his laughter when Frances and Billy told him he was the landed proprietor. He rolled on the floor with delight. Not that he cared so very much about owning anything except his little house and the tiny creek, but it so tickled his fancy that he now held the whip hand over "Pap."

"It's what he's been carryin' on about when he's too full of corn all these years. Poor ol' Pap! I'd a give it to him if he'd ever been square with me. Anyhow, I kin hold the Widder off. I sho' ain't

gonter give it to him now jest to see him hand it over to Mrs. Leary."

"Are you going to tell her about your owning the house and lot and all?" asked Frances.

"I guess I won't tell her so long as she don't git her hooks on the ol' man for good. Philanderin' over the gate ain't gonter hurt none. Of course the pies might do some damage, but maybe the ol' man has done larnt to go easy on 'em. I ain't even gonter tell him I know about the prop'ty; that is unless he gits a notion of lammin' me like he uster. He's carryin' on high 'bout my startin' back to school. Says I oughter go to work in the cotton mills. That's one thing I never am gonter do — I mean work in cotton mills. I pick up my livin' now on odds an' ends. Ain't cost the ol' man a cent since I was knee high to a duck, what with runnin'

errands for Mr. Griggs, watchin' cars an' holdin' hosses. I'm gonter git all the education that's comin' to me."

"That's fine, Tom," said Frances, "and I reckon you won't mind if I suggest your using better grammar in speaking. Would you?"

"Sure I wouldn't. What I done wrong now?"

"Don't say 'the ol' man has done larnt,' for instance."

"But supposin' he has, what then?"

"Say 'has learned.' I don't want to pick on you, Tom, but I'd be mighty glad if I could kind of help you speak more correctly."

"Help all you've a mind to," grinned Tom, "an' thank you kindly, but don't be so proper you take to soundin' like yo' gal friend—I mean that Miss Lina. She's nice enough, but she's too nice for me."

"Well, I'll try mighty hard not to be too nice," said Frances. "I'd hate to be teachy an' preachy." And thus Tom was by the way of being educated. Perhaps it was as incongruous for Frances to attempt to make a gentleman of Tom as it would be for Tom-boy Taylor to try a hand at Micky McGuire, but such things have happened.

Billy beamed his approval but Jimmy snorted his disgust.

"Ol' Frances Black's all time buttin' in on boys an' tryin' to make 'em talk like girls. She needn't think I'm a gonter change. If I won't talk pretty for my mamma I certainly ain't gonter do it for any ol' girl. Miss Minerva's already marked you, Billy. She's been after you ever since you came to be her boy an' now you've got so stuck up you don't even say 'ain't' any more. I betcher Miss Minerva

could take hold of Tom Collins an' in three shakes of a dead sheep's tail she could have him in a long tail black coat, talkin' as proper as a preacher."

But Miss Minerva had no idea of taking hold of Tom, literally or figuratively. She did not wish to touch him with a ten-foot pole. She blamed the hated radio entirely on Tom. Had he not installed it? At his instigation Billy had borrowed her batteries and Jimmy had taken Aunt Pauline Pirtle's ear trumpet. Was it not Tom who had suggested the boys' digging in the town dump for possible treasure?

That was the bitterest pill; her own nephew to have so demeaned himself as to go out and sit on an ash heap and dig and sift. Then when he found the bracelet to accept a reward from Mr. Carroll and his sister! The Major had endeavored to explain to her why Billy felt it to be perfectly

right to accept the reward. The Major thought Billy's logic was perfectly sound, but Minerva could only look at it in one way. At any rate, this radio was a great nuisance and Miss Minerva was afraid it was breaking up her home.

"My dear, why don't you let Billy bring the machine into the house?" asked the Major, patiently. "It could be installed in the living room where all of us could enjoy it."

"Never!" and Miss Minerva shut her mouth tightly, her lips drawn into an uncompromising straight line. "If I should allow that, Billy would have the house full of disreputable boys such as that Tom Collins. Now he can at least keep them out in the woodhouse attic. I think Mrs. Garner feels as I do in the matter. I am sure she does not want the radio in her parlor."

"I reckon not, because Miss Pirtle ob-

jects to it," smiled the Major, to whom Mr. Garner had confided their reasons for keeping Aunt Pauline Pirtle with them. "It seems the old lady has taken a great dislike to the radio because of her ear trumpet."

"Well, my nephew is being ruined by this devil's invention," declared Miss Minerva, grimly. "He is not studying at all and is never at home any more that he can possibly avoid being. I intend to put my foot down. Don't try to persuade me, Joseph. I am going to insist that William play with the toy only on Saturday afternoon. I am his lawful guardian and I shall exert my authority."

When his Minerva talked that way, the Major realized there was no use in arguing. He rather hoped the storm would not break until he returned from a business trip. He was sorry for Billy, but could

do nothing at present. He would be in Louisville for about a week. The Major was confident that sooner or later his wife would, as heretofore, come around to his way of managing Billy. But sometimes Miss Minerva came around much later than sooner, and in the interval she often, from a mistaken sense of duty, made her household very uncomfortable. At such times Billy would become sullen, which was entirely foreign to his disposition.

The radio was very dear to Billy's heart. It seemed so wonderful to him that with the wires and screws and dials and batteries one could draw from the air such marvelously beautiful sounds — that is, when the sounds were beautiful. Often it was only scrapings and screamings and ear splitting static yells, but there were nights when their little machine was in tune with the infinite.

His Aunt Minerva seemed never to be present when the radio worked. It went bad on them the minute she appeared on the scene, which was not very often. It seemed almost as though the sound waves were sensitive to an unsympathetic presence. A soul uplifting violin solo might be coming through from some far distant city —holding the little audience in the woodhouse attic spell bound, one and all with eyes moist and countenances enraptured with pure happiness — when Miss Minerva, with all good intentions, would appear on the scene. Immediately the strings on the violin would snap, the bow scrape and some fiend of the air would scream in derision. Of course Miss Minerva would think the beloved radio always behaved in that manner and her hatred of it increased.

Discipline must be maintained! Miss Minerva had put her foot down concern-

ing Billy and the radio and nothing would move her. She felt it to be her Christian duty to separate her nephew from the evil association of poor Tom Collins, who was not really evil at all, and to turn his thoughts to more important things than the insidious jazz music.

"Discuss the subject no further, William," she said after a rather stormy scene in which she had read the ultimatum to her nephew. "You may play with this radio on Saturday afternoon only, and not then unless your studies are completed for the following Monday. This thing of neglected tasks has gone far enough and I intend to do my duty by you so long as you remain under my roof. I consider the radio as an invention of the evil one—"

"But Aunt Minerva, you can hear——"

"Never mind what I can hear. I do not wish to hear any more than I have al-

ready heard. Above all, I wish to be obeyed. Go lock the trap door of the woodhouse attic and bring me the key."

Billy obeyed sullenly.

"Now," declared Aunt Minerva, self righteous in her conviction of Christian duty, "you may live to thank me for controlling you in regard to this wretched radio. You shall have the key on Saturday afternoon and not a moment before."

"But Aunt Minerva, half of it is Jimmy's."

"Exactly! He can come to me for the key and take his half away whenever it suits him. You may tell him I said so."

Billy lost no time in imparting the sad news of the locked trap door to Tom and Jimmy. Jimmy was violent in his denunciation of ladies who didn't understand boys.

"My mamma's all the time buttin' in

on me an' the radio, too. She's got a notion I ain't studyin' an' I tell her I'm doin' better an' better in every way an' every day an' besides I'm learnin' so many things over the radio I don't haveter study so much. I wish Miss Minerva Major wouldn't all time lock up my part of the radio 'long with yours."

"She says you can come get the key and carry away your half whenever you please," said Billy sadly. "You can take my half too, Jimmy, and maybe your mother would let you put it up in your house."

"Not while Aunt Pauline Pirtle is around. She's still on the rampage 'bout her ol' ear trumpet. She's so fussy I wish I'd borrowed her hoop skirt for a aerial while I was about it. It would a been a peach an' lots easier to put up than ol' Sarah Jane's chinchy bed springs."

"Well, the more I hear of women folks

the gladder I am that Pap is a man an' I don't hafter have females messin' 'roun' me," said Tom. "Looks like it's a pity we didn't make a portable machine whilst we were about it an we could pick up the hull thing an' take it off. As for an aerial, they make a spring coil, 'bout a hundred feet of wire, that makes a grand camping aerial. All you gotter do is hitch it to a high tree an' then connect up."

"Could you make the radio portable, Tom?" asked Billy, a grim determination showing in his otherwise angel face.

"Sure thing! It ain't so heavy now, an' I could lighten it a lot one way or another."

"Golly! Then let's get her so we can carry her off an' cut loose. I'm fed up on everything an' everybody. Aunt Minerva bosses my eyes outer me an' treats me like I have done all kinder things I

haven't ever thought of doin'. Just think of all the things we'll be missing if we can't listen in on the radio but once a week an' that on Saturday afternoon when there ain't so very much goin' on. Whatcher say, Jimmy?"

"I say I'm game. When do we start?"

"The sooner the better. We gotter have an outfit. Let's see, to-day is Wednesday. We can draw out our money to-morrow and get started on Saturday morning. We can get a good start before the folks miss us — not that anybody'd miss me much now that Maje is away. It's a good thing we've got our scout sleepin' bags. I reckon the nights are cold in the woods."

The key was borrowed from Mrs. Estes by Jimmy, who said he wished to remove his half of the property. The things were taken to Tom's house along with the camp equipment. The money was drawn from

the saving's bank, ten dollars apiece remaining from the bracelet reward.

"The only thing I mind is not tellin' Frances," Billy said. "She certainly has been a good sport 'bout the radio."

"There's no use in crying over skimmed milk," argued Jimmy. "Frances is all the time nothin' but a ol' girl, an' she can't go on adventures with us men. I'll give it to her that she ain't a baby 'bout most things, but she'd be scairt to death in the woods at night time. Anyhow, we might get arrested for carryin' her off. I reckon my mamma'll be right glad to have me outer the house. She is all time pretty near worried to death with me. I heard her telling my papa that she didn't know what she'd ever done to have such a careless, naughty boy. It was that ol' trumpet she was still harpin' on."

"Aunt Minerva'll sure be glad to get rid

of me, too," sighed Billy. "She must get darn tired of doin' her 'Christian duty' by me an' when I take myself off she can let up on her Christian duty. I can see by the way she looks at me that I'm what she calls a thorn in her flesh. I'm gonter come back some time and see the Major. He's a mighty fine man an' understands a fellow."

"Well, my ol' pap ain't gonter keer whether I come or go," said Tom. "Mo'n likely he ain't gonter know whether I'm come or gone."

CHAPTER XVII

THE RUNAWAY RADIO FANS

ATURDAY morning dawned clear and crisp. "Grand receivin' weather," Tom announced as the three boys skirted the dump pile on their way to the nearest woods. They had made an early start, so early that even Aunt Cindy was not stirring and that meant a very early start indeed. Aunt Cindy's chief pleasure in life was getting out of her own bed and pulling Wilkes Booth Lincoln and Decimus Ultimus out of theirs.

Billy had debated long within his own mind whether or not to take Wilkes Booth Lincoln on this radio elopement, but he had decided that the colored boy might get too much blame for the escapade and it would

be kinder to leave his lifetime friend and playmate at home. He also felt that it would be a mistake to tell Nicky anything about their plans. Aunt Minerva would be sure to question the boy and if he knew nothing he could say nothing. Wilkes Booth Lincoln was a poor liar and if he knew of the boys' whereabouts he would find it difficult to keep his knowledge to himself.

However, Billy had told Aunt Cindy he was planning a hike for Saturday. He had asked her for a generous lunch and the old woman had put it up on Friday night after supper. The boys often went on an all day Saturday hike, so no questions were asked and no lies told. Even Wilkes Booth Lincoln was not suspicious, although he was a little wistful that he was not asked to join the hike. But since he never could go on Saturday morning because of

the many chores Aunt Cindy demanded of him at that time, what was the use of Billy's asking him to go when he knew very well he would not be allowed to accept?

"Whicher way we goin'?" asked Jimmy as he trotted along between the longer legged boys. "Our 'quipment ain't no b'loon weights."

"Le's make tracks for the river," suggested Tom. "We'll keep to the woods for a piece an' then hit the pike an' mo'n likely git a lift."

"Whatcher gonter go towards the river for?" asked Jimmy.

Billy didn't care much in which direction their road of adventure lay. He was happy to be going anywhere but Jimmy always wanted to know the why of everything and usually had an objection to offer.

"I jes' been thinkin' I'd like to git out on a raft same as Huck Finn an' lay

back an' think," Tom answered. "I guess there's no use in leavin' home if your folks know where you are an' come an' find you right off. I calculate the river kin travel a heap sight faster than we kin. All we gotter do is rig up a raft an' start floatin'. But first thing is to git to the river."

The boys trudged sturdily along through the October woods, every now and then scaring up a Brer Rabbit or a Miss Molly Cotton-tail. Now a squirrel would drop a nut from a beech tree and now a covey of Bob Whites whirred from a thicket.

"Gee, ain't it a grand an' glorious feeling?" cried Billy. "I don't care if school never keeps again."

"School!" exclaimed Jimmy. "Th' ain't never no more school for James Lafayette Garner. Miss Radio's my teacher after this."

"What's that Shakeyourspear says 'bout

tongues in trees, books in the runnin' brooks, sermons in stones and so forth an' so on?" said Tom. "That ol' Shakeyourspear is so good anybody would mos' think Mark Twain hader writ it. I wonder what Mark an' Shake woulder thought 'bout radio. It seems kinder hard for folks like that to die before they find out 'bout things. I calculate Shake didn't even know 'bout steamboats like Mark did."

"Well, Shakespeare mus' a known something 'bout radio," put in Jimmy, "cause he's got a character named Aerial. It was in our English class last year. Say, when do we eat?"

"We ain't long ago et breakfast," declared Billy.

"Yes we ain't! It's pretty near supper time," insisted Jimmy. "I betcher we've walked twenty miles."

They had in reality walked only five

miles and by sun time it was not yet ten o'clock, but the boys decided to distribute their loads a little more evenly by eating some of Aunt Cindy's lunch that Billy had been carrying. Breakfast had been a sketchy meal for all of them and, after all, what was the hurry? Why shouldn't they eat when they were hungry and sleep when they were tired? Why not indeed! So they stretched out on a pleasant bed of dry leaves that the morning sun was warming and had a refreshing nap.

"Gee whilikins, but this is the life!" thought Billy as he yawned and stretched luxuriously. The sun was high. They must have slept a good two hours. Time was flying, but let it fly. What a day it was; hot in the sun and cold in the shade, with a sky as clear as all eternity and as blue as starch paper. A squirrel dropped a beech nut squarely on Jimmy's nose and

the boy sat up in his bed of leaves like an indignant dormouse.

"You quit that!" he roared as the saucy squirrel waved his bushy tail and skipped up another story in his tree house.

"When do we eat?" continued Jimmy. "I'm 'bout ready for breakfast after a night's rest. I reckon it must be to-morrow by now."

"Well, it's to-morrow if to-day is Friday, but it's yesterday if to-day is Sunday," laughed Tom. "If we finish up the lunch Billy brought we can begin at supper a cookin' up our provisions."

And so again they distributed their loads and the last crumbs of Aunt Cindy's lunch was stowed away in safe places.

"I guess we'd bes' be movin' if we gonter git anywheres before night time," said Tom. "The pike's over yonder a piece an' plenty of folks are travelin' on it

of a Saturday afternoon. Reckon somebody'll give us a ride."

"I'm mighty tired of luggin' all this 'quipment," complained Jimmy. "You two ain't got near so much to lug as I have an' I think you oughter take on some extra for your shares. If I was the skinny one an' you two were the fat ones I betcher I'd have a heart."

Billy and Tom good naturedly relieved their fat friend of some of his load, since by nature he had so much to carry. The boys then struck out for the pike that would lead them in the direction of the Mississippi River. Tom was right — there was a deal of traffic on the highroad. Most of it was headed for town, but they were finally overtaken by a genial young farmer in a truck who stopped at their hail and let them clamber in the back of his machine, where they bounced around on top of the

various goods he had purchased in town.

"Come up front with me," he shouted to Billy. "Where are you boys headed for?" he asked as Billy climbed to the seat by him.

"The river."

"What are you going to do there?"

"Oh, camp an' fish an' make a raft an' install a radio," said Billy, with no idea of telling anything but the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

"Install a radio? Gee, that's great! I've got a radio that I am having a grand time with. My wife don't think so much of it because she says it's always static when she has time to fool with it, but I can't get my fall ploughing done for working on the thing. I got Quebec the other night."

"So did we, but we couldn't make out what we were hearing."

"Neither could I, but what's the odds? It's hearing the station that counts with me. That's what gets my wife's goat. She's not satisfied unless she knows *what* she is hearing. Women folks are funny that way."

"They certainly are," agreed Billy, somewhat sadly.

Billy had begun to think of home a little for the first time since he left the sleeping family. He began to wonder what they were doing and whether or not anyone had begun to suspect his having gone for more than a Saturday hike.

"What time is it, sir?"

"Three o'clock! Days are getting mighty short. Nights are cold, too. How come you boys choose this time of year to camp?"

"Oh, it's a good time — no skeeters or bugs to crawl on you an' snakes all crawled in their holes for winter."

"That's so! I wish I could go along, but my wife—" and the young farmer sighed. "I wish I could take you boys farther but I turn in here. I reckon you won't have any trouble getting another ride. Plenty of folks traveling the pike these days. Well, so long!"

The boys were profuse in their thanks.

"Too bad he was married," Billy said. "He was such a nice man an' has got a radio besides."

The three trudged on. Their packs were heavier than they were before the farmer picked them up and while there was much travel on the road, they could not get another ride. Every car was either loaded or its occupants indifferent to the young wayfarers. Finally Jimmy stopped and bellowed forth:

"See here, is this a pleasure trip or ain't it? If it ain't, I got on the wrong boat;

an' if it is, I'm gonter stop right here an' eat. I'm tuckered out an' as hungry as a bear. I move we stop movin'."

"Well don't le's stop in the middle of the pike," laughed Tom. "Look, over yonder's a bit of woods an' them cow paths leadin' over that little hill to the woods looks like they oughter be a spring somewheres around. We don't wanter camp fur from a spring."

The boys tumbled over the rail fence. Sure enough, beyond the little hill was a nice, bubbling spring. They knelt down in the lush grass and plunged their hot faces into the clear water.

"Gee, I reckon I drank up a few pollywogs," said Billy, shaking the drops from his yellow hair that would curl in spite of him. "But I ain't carin'. I never did taste such good water."

"I'm gonter give my pigs a drink, too,"

declared Jimmy as he pulled off his shoes and stockings. "There've been plenty of cows here before us trompin' around in the spring, so I reckon boy feet won't do any more harm than cow hoofs," and he dabbled his toes in the water.

The sight of the spring and the grassy banks brought back to Tom the memory of his own stream and the Widow Leary. Would his absence give her the opportunity to lead old Pap to the altar and make a hog wallow of his little branch? He suddenly had a vague uneasiness. No doubt food would dispel it, so he willingly joined Jimmy in the chorus of: "When do we eat?"

The grove of trees, a scant stone's throw from the stream, was an ideal place for camp. "And yonder's the very tree for our aerial, easy to climb an' all!" cried Billy. A camp fire was made in short order

and soon bacon was sizzling in the rusty frying pan and eggs becoming delightfully greasy in the bacon drippings.

"Turn 'em over an' get 'em good an' hard," said Jimmy. "My mamma says it's vulgar to fry eggs on both sides, but then my mamma puts on lots of airs sometimes.

Not that she ain't mighty nice," he added, looking a little wistfully at the hunk of bread that served as a plate on which to serve his bacon and eggs. A vision of the supper table at home flashed upon his inward eye. What a pretty, cozy supper table his mother always had! There would be some flowers in the center of the cloth and the silver in sedate rows, a knife and spoon and fork for each thing. Jimmy remembered how often he teased his mother about her array of silver and how he would insist upon using the wrong implement. The thought brought a slight mist to his eyes as, sans knife, fork or spoon, he bit into his hunk of bread and tried vainly not to get the fried egg on his ears.

"Gee, this ol' wood smoke makes my eyes water! Gimme another egg! I'm as hollow as a hogshead."

Billy, too, was thinking of home. He

was wondering if they had yet realized that he was gone. He had left a note in the woodhouse attic on the table where the radio had been. He had put it there so that it might not be found too soon. It was a short note to his Aunt Minerva, in which he had merely stated that he was sorry to have been such a nuisance to her with his radio and everything and he would try not to be one any more. The note also requested that she give his love to the Major and Josephine and Wilkes Booth Lincoln and Aunt Cindy, and please to tell Frances that he was sorry she was a girl because he would like for her to go, too. Also telephone Mrs. Garner that Jimmy was going too, because he was afraid his mother was just as tired of him. She need not let old Collins know about Tom because he didn't care where Tom went.

A picture of the woodhouse attic as it would be in the gathering dusk, came to his mind. The place would be all shadowy and dark, with the note to Aunt Minerva on the table, gleaming very white under the spotlight thrown on it after the movie fashion of finding notes. Had they found it yet? Poor Nicky! Billy could not bear to think of Nicky, and then the wood smoke got in his eyes, too.

Tom turned the rusty skillet upside-down on the fire and let the flames burn out the grease. Then he wiped it out with a wisp of dried grass and propped it against the tree.

"Now for our radio!" he shouted.

Billy was up the tree in an instant and the spring aerial was attached in no time. Tom worked on the portable radio and Jimmy piled more faggots on the fire.

"Now hook her up an' le's see. Gee it's

a workin'!" cried Tom. "The whippoorwills an' tree frogs'll haveter take a back seat this night. It's static now but jes' you wait. Now! There's WHAS—that's Louisville, Kentuck—the Alamo Orchestra! Gee! Golly dern, but ain't that pretty?"

"I wonder if that nice farmer who gave us a lift is tuning in on this too," said Billy. "I do hope his wife ain't objectin' too much."

CHAPTER XVIII

MISS MINERVA BROADCASTS

IN THE meantime, back home, things were moving, too. Miss Minerva's conscience had begun giving that lady many little sly digs. She had met Mrs. Maurice Richmond at market in the morning and that sweet lady had spent so much of the time praising Billy that her grim listener had entirely forgotten to pinch all of the fruit before she bought it to see that it was perfectly sound. She had also permitted the egg and poultry man to slip in some very small eggs and a pair of roasting hens that had to be boiled before they could be baked. This would never have happened had the particular housekeeper been attending strictly to business.

"He is really a charming boy," Mrs. Richmond continued. "So handsome, so clever and so extremely polite and well mannered. I am sure, Mrs. Estes, you are proud of your nephew. I hear he has installed a radio. Aren't they too delightful? Maurice has one that he paid ever so much for, but I am told that Billy's is much clearer. Of course I know Tom Collins did much of the work, but I am sure it was Billy's cleverness that accomplished the success. What Billy starts always gets finished. I am sure all of you enjoy the radio as we do. I find it makes a home so happy and interesting. I am afraid that Maurice and I were becoming restless, running around so much in our car, always on the go, but now we find so much to amuse us at home — thanks to the radio."

Miss Minerva hurriedly added some stringy string beans to her purchases and

left the shop. Was she wrong after all? Was it her duty to have the radio brought in the house and even let her home be filled with ungodly strains of strange, garish music? She wished devoutly for the Major and regretted deeply that his business would keep him away from home so many days. Well, she would talk to Billy about it at dinner time. She had promised him he could have the key and play with the radio on Saturday afternoon. Perhaps she would relent and let him go to the woodhouse attic as soon as she reached home. Yes, she would do that very thing; and if he promised not to let it interfere further with his lessons she would have the hated machine brought in the house and installed in the living room as a surprise to her husband. The Major would like that. Miss Minerva beamed happily in contemplation of her husband's approval.

"Where's Billy, Aunt Cindy?" she asked as soon as she reached home.

"Done gone walkin' on a bike."

"Walking on a bicycle?"

"No'm, a hike I reckon it is an' not no bike. Anyhow I fixed up enough lunch to make a impression on the bottomless pit an' them boys done pick up they own brekfus an' gone. I done tol' you they were gone trampin' oncet this mornin' but I reckon you wa' took up with yo' thoughts an' didn't give it no mind. Don't you 'member at brekfus?"

"Yes, yes, I had forgotten. When will they be home?"

"When they gits hongry. I 'low that there lunch will holt 'em up to jes' about fo' o'clock an' then they'll come a biking back home."

Four o'clock came and no boys. Miss Minerva felt vaguely uneasy. She called

up Mrs. Garner on the telephone. Sarah Jane answered:

"Mr. and Mrs. Garner air takin' a night off from that ol' lady, Miss Pauline Pirtle, an' they air dependin' on that there Jimmy to come back an' set up to the supper table with his Great Aunt Pauline. I ain't jes' sho' whar they done gone. It mought a been the Country Club, but now I 'members it wa' somewhars else, but it done slipped my mind whar. Jes' as soon as that there Jimmy turns up, please sen' him kitin' home, Miss Minerva."

Not much satisfaction from Sarah Jane. Miss Minerva paused a moment and then bethought her of Frances Black. She had noted with satisfaction that Frances had been playing with Billy lately. She liked Frances; liked and trusted her. Frances liked Miss Minerva and hurried over the moment that lady telephoned for her.

"Perhaps I am foolish, Frances, but I feel strangely uneasy about Billy. Do you know where he has gone?"

"Hiking, I think. It was mean of them not to ask me to go along. I can hold out just as long as that fat Jimmy. They've had something up their sleeves ever since Wednesday. I don't know what it is and I scorned trying to find out."

"Well, Frances, I have decided to let Billy bring his radio into the living room, and I rather thought you might help me. Don't you think it would be a nice surprise if we had it here ready to greet him when he returns from his — er — walk?"

"Fine, Miss Minerva. I ain't quite sure I could install it, but I could try. I haven't seen the boys to talk to them since you made them lock the door to the attic."

Miss Minerva gave Frances the key and followed the girl up the ladder.

"Why look, the radio's gone!" called Frances as Miss Minerva's head emerged through the trap-door.

"Oh, only Jimmy's half. I gave Billy the key so that Jimmy might remove his half. I fancy there is enough left to make all the noise necessary to drive one to distraction."

Frances snorted at Miss Minerva's ignorance and laughed to think what Tom Collins would say at the idea of running a radio with half of it gone.

"There's nothing left except a few old snippets of wire and some broken screws, but here's a letter addressed to you."

Miss Minerva read the letter and then sank on a broken chair and burst into tears. She handed the paper to Frances with a faint: "Read it!"

Frances was somewhat mollified by Billy's message to her. Of course there was

no gainsaying that she was a girl, and perhaps it would not have been quite proper for her to have gone off for good with the boys, but she gave an eloquent tug at her hated skirts after reading the letter.

"Well!" said Miss Minerva when she could control her tears enough to say anything.

"Well, I reckon we've gotter be acting," said Frances.

"Yes, but what—how?"

"Find out whichaway they went an' bring them back. I betcher they drew out their money from the savings bank on Thursday. They got leave from school at recess and so did I because I hadter 'tend to something for my mother. On the way home I remember now I saw them coming out the bank. Of course they've taken the radio to install it somewhere. Let's see if they've taken their scout sleepin' bags."

On searching Billy's room it was found that he had taken not only his sleeping bag but other camping equipment.

"I betcher they're gonter camp an' put up their radio an' enjoy it without anybody kicking."

Miss Minerva gulped. Oh, if only she had relented sooner.

"I betcher this minute they've put up a spring aerial an' set up a camp radio," exclaimed Frances, her eyes shining at the thought. "Miss Minerva, I've got an idea! Now listen!"

Of course Miss Minerva listened, because Frances' ideas were always worth while. The upshot of the idea was that in an hour Miss Minerva's little Ford coupe was filled with gas enough for a long ride, oil and water looked into, tires pumped up and the headlights turned towards Memphis.

"Tom's house is on the way. Let's stop

an' see if old Collins knows anything about his son," suggested Frances.

Old Collins was not at home but Fat Molly came to the door in answer to Frances' knock.

"Yes, I know whar Tom's gone — he's gone to Guinea an' I don't much blame him. I tells you, white gal, there's trouble a brewin' for that thar white boy — trouble an' a plenty of it. His ol' pappy ain't got much mo' sense than a feesh — jes' drinkin' his way through life. An' now he's done got caught in a net. The Widder Leary air made up her min' to marry him an' marry him she's gonter do termorrow, Sunday an' all. She done see Tom early this mornin' startin' off with a heap er luggage, 'long with that there Billy an' Jimmy, an' it come to her that the time wa' ripe to pluck ol' Collins an' an' she air done did it. License air got, an' got by the Widder

Leary. I'm here a cleanin' up. Not that I wants the job, but I ain't a gonter have that white ooman a comin' in an' sayin' I lef' no dirt."

"But do you know which way the boys went?" asked Frances, who had another idea. "If you give me some idea perhaps I can get Tom back in time to stop the wedding."

"To'ds the ribber er co'se! Boys allus makes fer water, even ef they ain't over fond er usin' it."

Miss Minerva had never broken the speed laws before, but on the road to Memphis she literally burned up the pike. Her little car seemed like a horse that feels its oats. It bounded along at her touch, passing high power cars as though they were ox carts.

They reached Memphis at eight o'clock. In spite of the uneasiness she could but

feel for Billy, Miss Minerva enjoyed the ride. There was something so exhilirating in action. The girl by her side inspired her to glory in the adventure, and cheered her by repeated assurances that Billy would be back home in a short while.

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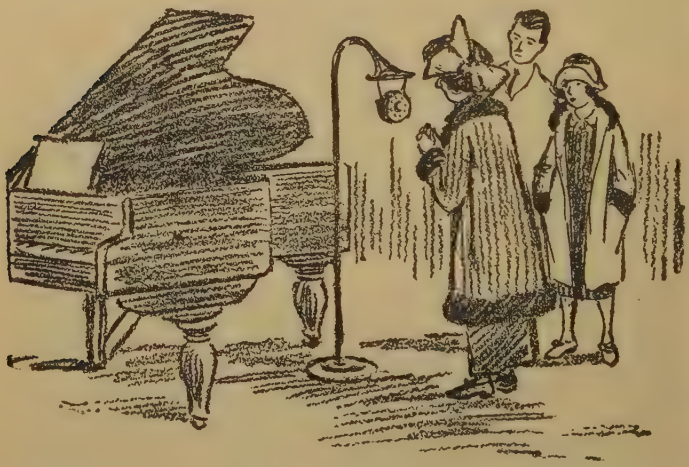
"Comin' in strong now," said Tom, lolling on a pile of dry leaves just far enough from the fire not to "ketch."

"Never better!" agreed Billy. "I reckon WMC is what we can get best with this rig. Not near so much static as with WHAS. I don't see why we shouldn't patronize home industry anyhow. Ol' WMC is good enough for me. Listen, there's the announcer!"

Clear and strong came a man's voice:

"We take pleasure in broadcasting this message for the benefit of a respected family of Tennessee. A lady has just come to

this station asking for help. Her nephew, with two other boys, has left home under the mistaken belief that he is not understood nor wanted by his aunt. She wants him to come back to her immediately. The



lady will now speak and should her nephew and his friends hear, we are sure her appeal will be all that is necessary."

The boys jumped to their feet as the familiar sound of Miss Minerva's voice issued from the horn:

"Billy, come home. I have decided to let you install your radio in the living room. I feel somehow that you are hearing me. Jimmy's mother and father do not as yet know that he has gone away. Please come back. Think of the Major."

Billy tried not to sob and succeeded after a struggle. Then Frances' voice came from the horn:

"Tom, your father will marry the Widow Leary to-morrow. You'd better hurry home an' save your little stream from the hogs."

Surely a stranger message was never sent over a radio!

* * * * * * * *

"Wife, only listen to this! Memphis is in the air and what she is sayin' is a plenty."

It was the young farmer who had given the boys a lift on the highway. He was

bending over his beloved radio when the message to Billy was being broadcasted. His wife was seated across the room from him, an impatient look on her otherwise charming face.

"Please come over and listen," he pleaded.

She came and stood by his side, her hand on his shoulder. She had tried to be interested in this radio, but it seemed to her that it occupied all of her husband's waking hours. They had not been married so very long and it was hard to have an old machine supplant her in her husband's affections, at least that was what she fancied the radio had done.

Miss Minerva's plea came to her quite distinctly. There was something in the voice that brought tears to the young woman's eyes.

"Why — why — it's a real woman in

trouble. Oh, my dear, can't we help her somehow. She seems so near and so sad."

"Sure we can help!" cried the young farmer, jumping to his feet and hugging his pretty wife. "I gave those very boys a lift this afternoon and this minute they are camping not far from here. I saw a light from their campfire when I was feedin' the stock. It's right over yonder across Billings' cow pasture. Come on, honey, we can crank up the flivver and drive those boys to town in a jiffy. It's a bully night and a ride with you will be like old times."

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The Major, now in Louisville, was a bit homesick. He had been worrying about his Minerva's attitude towards Billy and was a little afraid trouble might be brewing between aunt and nephew.

"If Minerva would only soften up a little more," he mused as, after a very good

dinner, he lolled in a deep leather chair, trying to enjoy a cigar and persuade himself that all was well at home. "Billy's got plenty of sense, but he's spirited and Minerva ought to give in."

Strains from the club radio blew into the room and made him even more homesick.

"Come on in and listen, Major Estes," called a young acquaintance. "WMC is speaking. Surely you want to hear what old Tennessee has to say for herself."

As the Major moved towards the door, a voice came from the radio:

"Her nephew, with two other boys, has left home under the mistaken belief that he is not understood nor wanted by his aunt—"

The Major stood spellbound. Suddenly his wife's voice took up the plea:

"Billy, come home. I have decided to let you install your radio in the living room.

I feel somehow that you are hearing me. . . . Please come back. Think of the Major."

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Thanks to the young farmer and his pretty wife and their reliable flivver, the boys reached home ahead of Miss Minerva and Frances, although Miss Minerva made record time on the return trip.

Tom immediately went to call on the Widow Leary and had it out with her. Her indignation knew no bounds and she threatened to sue the perfidious Collins for breach of promise. But since he made no promises at all in the presence of witnesses, or otherwise, she realized that she had no grounds for a suit. As far as his drunken stupor would permit him to speak, old Collins was just as willing to marry her as he had ever been, which was nothing more than passive indifference. One thing sure,

the widow Leary had no idea of marrying the old man without his bit of ground.

"The ol' man oughter thank me," Tom later confided in Billy. "He'll live longer than he woulder eatin' the Widow Leary's pies. And my little stream! I'll never forget Frances for broadcasting the news to me an' givin' me a chanct to save my bit of water."

Billy had just reached home when the telephone rang sharply. He ran to answer it.

"Hello! This is Major Estes' residence!"

"That you, Billy? This is Maje speaking. Are you all right, boy?"

"Sure — an' how about you, Maje?"

"Right as a trivet! Is your Aunt Minerva home yet?"

"No, Maje. How did you know she was off?"

"It was in the air, my boy, in the air. Give her my love when she comes in, son, and tell her she is the finest woman in Tennessee. And you 'might tell Frances Black that she bids fair to become the next finest one. Good-night, son!"

"Good-night, Maje!"